NATION

300 trafficked Indians 'revolt' in Cambodia

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Market cap of firms hit $5T for first time ever

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

RR desperate to arrest slide against RCB

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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If not for Ambedkar, Nehru would've junked quota: PM

Modi charged INDIA bloc of giving quota based on religion

MOTIHARI/ PRAYAGRAJ, 21 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched a fresh attack on Congress, accusing its top leaders, including first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, of having "opposed" reservations for deprived castes.

"Had it not been for Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Nehru would have never agreed to quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs. Nehru had made his views clear on the issue in letters he wrote to the then chief ministers in the country", claimed Modi at a rally in Bihar's.

"This has been the Congress' trait under successive prime ministers. Be it, Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi, they all opposed reservations. SCs, STs and OBCs have never got respect from the Congress", Modi added.

Modi made the allegation while lashing out at the Opposition for spreading a "falsehood" that the BJP, upon return to power with a brute majority, could scrap quotas by changing the Constitution.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by UP DyCM Keshav Prasad Maurya in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

"The truth is that we have been protecting the rights of the deprived castes", claimed the prime minister who spelt out his government's measures to assert "it is only with the NDA led by BJP that rights of SCs, STs and OBCs are secure".

Modi also charged the INDIA bloc with having plans to give reservation benefits "on the basis of religion".

Modi recalled Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav's 'boys will be boys' remark while lauding the Yogi Adityanath government on women safety in Uttar Pradesh.

Addressing a women's conference in Varanasi, Modi said women were neglected during Congress and Samajwadi Party rule.

He invoked a controversial remark made by Mulayam Singh Yadav a decade back while opposing capital punishment for rape. The SP leader had said boys make mistakes.

Modi said men can't dare to repeat such mistakes in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh.

Modi also called Congress and Samajwadi Party "anti-development", and said both parties have competed in the appeasement of their vote bank.

"What used to happen (at Kumbh) during the time of SP-Congress? There used to be stampedes in the crowd, people had to die, there was anarchy everywhere ... Because they were more concerned about their vote bank than the Kumbh," he said.

"They (SP and Congress) were afraid if were seen doing something extra for Kumbh, their vote bank might feel bad. A competition of appeasement used to take place between the SP and Congress," Modi said, addressing a rally in the region known for the Kumbh Mela and the 'Triveni Sangam'.

—PTI

WORKERS IN DISTRESS

Belagavi sugar unit fires 380 workers without notice

Workers are calling for action to rectify the situation *PHOTO: SALAR*

BELAGAVI, 21 MAY

At least 380 workers were abruptly terminated from the Shivsagar Sugar factory within one week in Belagavi's Udupudi village without any prior notice. The sudden layoffs have left the workers, many of whom have been with the factory for over a decade, in a state of distress and uncertainty. The incident unfolded after the new group took over the company just four days ago.

The company was taken over by Arihanta Sugar Industries who had been running the factory for the past three years on a lease basis. The workers, supported by local activists and labour unions, are calling for immediate action to rectify the situation. They argue that the new owners should have conducted a more humane and transparent transition process, ensuring that the employees were either retained or given adequate notice and severance pay.

"We are permanent employees of the factory and have been working here for the last 15 years. But now, we have been fired without any reason. The new owners must continue our employment. We will continue our struggle until our job security is reinstated," said Basavaraja Lingareddy, one of the affected workers.

Hundreds of displaced workers gathered and submitted a petition to Deputy Commissioner Nitesh Patila. They demanded the continuation of their employment and urged the authorities to intervene in what they perceived as an unjust and abrupt termination.

Responding to the workers' pleas, Patila has promised to look into the matter. "We understand the gravity of the situation and the impact on the workers and their families. Our office will conduct a thorough investigation into the circumstances."

The incident has sparked debate on the need for stricter regulations to protect workers from sudden layoffs. Labour rights advocates argue that this case should serve as a wake-up call for both the government and private sector to enforce and respect labour laws. *—Salar News*

Ashoka seeks CBI probe into HDK 'phone tapping'

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

BJP leader and Leader of Opposition in Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka on Tuesday demanded a CBI probe into allegations of phone tapping made by JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy.

Kumaraswamy had alleged that 40 phones, including his own and those of his family members and supporters, are being tapped, which Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Home Minister G Parameshwara have dismissed.

"Kumaraswamy has alleged that phones of about 40 people are being tapped. A former chief minister, he has run the government in the past," Ashoka said. *—PTI*

5-yr-old dies due to brain-eating amoeba in Kerala

MALAPPURAM, 21 MAY

A five-year-old girl afflicted by amoebic meningoencephalitis, a rare brain infection caused by a free-living amoeba found in contaminated waters, in Malappuram district of Kerala died, official sources said on Tuesday. The child hailing from Moonniyur panchayat here died on Monday night at the Kozhikode Medical College's Institute of Maternal and Child Health, where she was undergoing treatment for over a week, they said.

According to medical experts, the infection is caused when free-living, non-parasitic amoebae bacteria enter the body through the nose from contaminated water. The girl had taken bath in a nearby pond on 1 May and by 10 May showed symptoms of fever, the sources said. *—PTI*

Harassed by loan lender, Belagavi farmer dies by suicide

BELAGAVI, 21 MAY

A 55-year-old farmer died by suicide after allegedly being harassed by a woman moneylender over repayment of Rs 1.50 lakh loan amount taken from her, police said on Tuesday. The incident occurred in Islampura village of Hukkeri taluk in Belagavi district.

According to police, the farmer - Raju Khotagi- allegedly consumed poison on Sunday and was rushed to a hospital where he was admitted. Unfortunately, he died a day later. Preliminary enquiry has suggested that the farmer had taken Rs 1.50 lakh loan from 60-year-old Siddavva Bayyanavara of the same village some six months ago after he allegedly suffered losses owing to severe drought. On 18 May, the woman had summoned Raju and his family to her house. She asked them to pay back the loan amount immediately, a senior police officer said. The deceased's wife alleged that she and her son were allegedly "confined" in the accused woman's house, police said, adding these are only allegations and need to be verified. "Based on the complaint by victim's family, we have registered a case under sections of Prevention of Atrocities Act and 306 (Abetment of suicide) of Indian Penal Code against the accused woman at Yamakanmardi police station, a senior police officer said.

—PTI

- The deceased's wife alleged that she and her son were allegedly "confined" in the accused woman's house, police said, adding these are only allegations and need to be verified.

MALIWAL ASSAULT WILL DIM INDIA'S IMAGE: DELHI LG

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena on Tuesday said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's "deafening silence" on the alleged assault on AAP Rajya Sabha MP "speaks volumes of his stance on safety of women" and stressed that CM should have not been "evasive" and "dodgy" on the incident.

Hitting back, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said LG's letter proves "Maliwal is working at the behest of BJP."

Delhi Police on Saturday arrested Kumar, an aide of Kejriwal, after Maliwal accused him of assaulting her on 13 May at Delhi Chief Minister's official residence.

In a statement on X by Raj Niwas, Saxena said the Delhi Police is investigating the matter and it will be brought to its "logical conclusion." He also called the alleged U-turn by the party on the matter "baffling." Saxena rooted for Maliwal even, as he said, she has been "vociferous", "hostile" and "blatantly partisan towards me and my office, often criticizing me unjustifiably." Saxena said it was "most disturbing" that the alleged scene of crime was the drawing room of the Chief Minister, even while he was allegedly present in the house, and that it was carried out by his "closest aide" on a woman who was alone. On May 14, senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh had said that the incident with Maliwal was "highly condemnable" and claimed that Kumar had "misbehaved" with her. *—PTI*

Sisodia to stay in jail till 31 May as HC denies relief

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Manish Sisodia *PHOTO: PTI*

Delhi High Court on Tuesday denied bail to AAP leader Manish Sisodia in all the cases pertaining to the alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy 2021-22, saying that there was no delay on the part of the prosecution to supply the documents and trial court to frame the charge.

Meanwhile, Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court extended the judicial custody till 31 May in the Delhi liquor excise policy case.

The court has asked the accused persons to give an estimate of time required for inspection of documents. It has also directed the ED to file a comprehensive reply on a plea of Sameer Mahendru seeking support of CCTV footage. The court has also directed the ED to file a detailed compliance report on how much time given to accused to inspect the documents and when they were not given time.

Sisodia has been in custody since 26 February, 2023, after arrest by the CBI. Thereafter, he was arrested by the ED. Sisodia resigned from the Delhi cabinet on 28 February, 2023.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja also said, "It is apparent that the Applicant individually, and along with different accused have been filing one or the other application/making oral submissions frequently, some of them frivolous, that too on a piecemeal basis, apparently as a concerted effort for accomplishing the shared purpose of causing delay in the matter."

—ANI

Dalit poet Lakkur Anand found dead

KALABURAGI, 20 MAY

The literary world mourns the loss of Lakkur Anand, a prominent Dalit poet, researcher, and translator, who was found dead near the Central University of Karnataka in Kalaburagi district on Monday.

The 44-year-old, a PhD scholar from Kannada Department of the University who won several prestigious awards, including the AnandKendra Sahitya Akademi Yuva Award, Dalit Sahitya Parishad Award of Delhi, Sri Sri Kavya of Andhra, Vibha Sahitya Award, Du Nim Belagali Award, and Dr Thipperudra Swamy Award, Kadengodlu Shankara Bhat Award, dedicated his awards to the oppressed communities. Anand's body was discovered by locals, who then informed the police. His remains were sent for a post-mortem examination and returned to his home in Kolar. University authorities have faced criticism for their lack of initiative in facilitating the return of Anand's body.

Lakkur Anand *PHOTO: PTI*

Anand, a native of Kolar district, is famous for his literary contributions include one research book, five poetry collections, and five translations of poetry. He had a distinguished career as a Kannada lecturer at Kengeri Seshadripuram College. His notable translations include Rani Shiva Shankar Sharma's "Koney Brahmana," published by Abhinava Prakashan.

—Salar News

1 killed, 3 injured in post-poll violence in Bihar

SARAN, 21 MAY

One was killed and three others injured in post-poll violence in Bihar's Saran district on Tuesday morning, police said. The deceased was identified as Chandan Yadav, 25. The incident happened in Bada Telma area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk. An altercation broke out between two groups, said to be supporters of BJP and RJD, over allegations of irregularities during polling that happened on Monday in the area, amid which shots were fired. "The injured persons were admitted to the hospital. Later, two of them were sent to Patna," Superintendent of Police Gaurav Mangla said. *—PTI*

Brij pleads not guilty to sexual harassment charges

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

A Delhi court on Tuesday framed charges of sexual harassment, intimidation and outraging the modesty of women against ex-Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and six-time Lok Sabha MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in a criminal case filed by female wrestlers. Singh pleaded not guilty to the charges and claimed trial.

"Why will I plead guilty when I am not guilty?" Singh told Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Priyanka Rajpoot.

The court also framed the charge of criminal intimidation against co-accused and former WFI assistant secretary Vinod Tomar in the case.

Brij Bhushan *PHOTO: PTI*

The judge posted the matter for further proceedings on 1 June. ACMM Rajpoot observed there was "sufficient evidence" to proceed against him.

The court framed the charges against Singh under IPC sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354A (sexual harassment) and 506 (criminal intimidation).

—PTI

'DARKNESS BHAGYA'

Chitradurga doc uses torch to check patient

CHITRADURGA, 21 MAY

A doctor treating a patient using the flashlight of a mobile phone in a government hospital in Chitradurga district in the State prompted BJP to attack the ruling government on Tuesday, calling it 'Darkness Bhagya'.

According to sources, the area is affected by power cuts for the past one week and the hospital is no exception. BJP's 'Darkness Bhagya' jibe is apparently aimed at the ruling Congress' scheme of providing free electricity up to 200 units under its 'Gruha Jyoti' to households.

BJP called it 'Darkness Bhagya' gifted as another 'guarantee' on the completion of one year of Siddaramaiah's government.

The party also shared the video on X.

The video shows that the medical store also depends on patients' mobile phone's flash light to give them medicines *PHOTO: X/@BJP4KARNATAKA*

The video shows that the medical store also depends on patients' mobile phone's flash light to give them medicines.

""One year guarantee 'Darkness Bhagya' It's a gift from Congress government in Karnataka which is celebrating the completion of one year in the office! Congress government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has reached such a dire situation that even hospitals are not supplied with electricity. Treasury is empty, and there is no electricity! This is a 'Chombu' (round water pot) and 'Chippu' (coconut shell) government!", BJP said.

Congress had called the Central government 'Chombu' government, symbolising emptiness. In retaliation, BJP launched a drive calling the Siddaramaiah regime as 'Chippu' government. Chippu depicts uselessness. *—PTI*

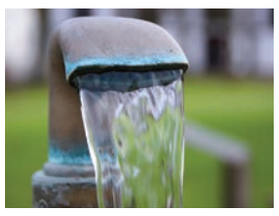


PHOTO: PIXABAY

Mysuru: Drinking contaminated water kills man

MYSURU, 21 MAY

One died and many others fell ill after drinking contaminated water in a village in Salundi village under Chamundeshwari Assembly constituency on 20 May, police said on Tuesday. The affected persons were admitted to the hospital. Taking serious note of the incident, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah today directed authorities concerned to investigate the matter and ensure proper treatment to those in the hospital.

According to police, Kanakaraj, 20, died after consuming the contaminated water and Kanakaraj was admitted to a private hospital. On learning about the incident, Siddaramaiah spoke to Deputy Commissioner and District Health Officer over phone regarding the death. "CM instructed the officials to ascertain the cause of water pollution," CM's office said in a statement. *—PTI*

Man suffers burns as girlfriend's dad throws hot water

MADIKERI, 21 MAY

A 27-year-old man suffered severe burns and face disfigurement after his girlfriend's father allegedly threw hot water on him, in Madikeri. The victim, Suhail was a resident of Ganapati Street in Madikeri and was in a relationship with Zeenat, who lived in Madenadu, Coorg. On Monday, Zeenat called Suhail and informed him about the alleged violence she was facing at home. Reportedly, she did not want to stay there anymore. Suhail went to Zeenat's house to check on her. However, upon his arrival, he encountered Zeenat's father, Sadhik, and a confrontation ensued. During the altercation, Sadhik threw hot water on Suhail. Suhail was immediately taken to KIMS Hospital, where he is currently receiving treatment for his burns. He is in a critical condition. *—Salar News*

2 held for possessing illegal firearms in M'luru

MANGALURU, 21 MAY

Central Crime Bureau of Mangaluru police has arrested two men for allegedly possessing illegal firearms and live ammunition, officials said on Tuesday. They have been identified as Mohammad Asgar, 26 and Abdul Nisar K, 29, both residents of Manjeshwar of Kasargod district in Kerala. Mangaluru Central Crime Bureau (CCB) police received information that two people in Pilikur area of Talapadi village of Ullal taluk were allegedly roaming around in a black car without any licence and carrying a pistol. According to Mangaluru city police Commissioner, Anupam Aggarwal, the raiding CCB team confiscated a pistol, two live rounds of ammunition, two mobile phones, a black Hyundai Verna. *—PTI*

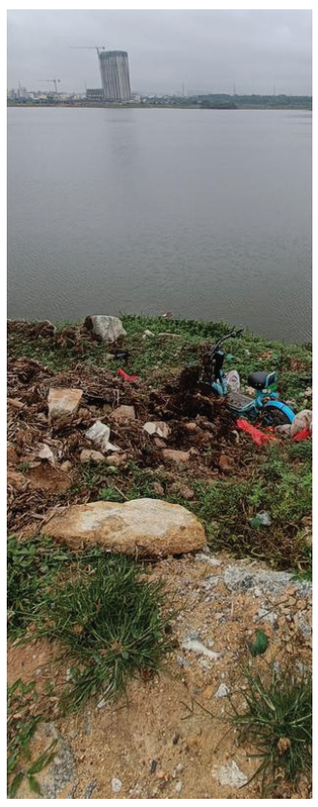
2 of family die in car-truck collision in Shiradi Ghat

SAKLESHPURA, 21 MAY

Two people of a family died and five others were injured in a collision involving an SUV and a container lorry in Shiradi Ghat of Dakshina Kannada district early on Tuesday, police said. The deceased hailed from Bondala village near Panemangalore in Mangaluru taluk. According to police, the mishap occurred near Kempuholay bridge of Shiradi Ghat when the family was travelling to Mangaluru after attending a relative's wedding banquet in Bengaluru. Those who sustained serious injuries were admitted to a private hospital in Mangaluru. A case was registered and the driver of the truck was taken into custody for further investigation, they said. *—PTI*

Begur Lake: Once a birdwatcher's paradise, now a dumping ground

BBMP official told Salar News lake will be rejuvenated in 3 months



NAYANA NAVEEN
BENGALURU, 21 MAY

Begur Lake, a haven for exotic birds and a source of serenity for residents, has become a victim of neglect and pollution for the past six years. The 137-acre lake, which once teemed with coots, grebes, egrets, and herons, is now a garbage dumping ground, leaving residents and environmentalists fuming.

For over a decade, Begur residents such as Ravi, an IT professional, cherished the morning view and the symphony of birdsong at the lake.

"It was a perfect start to the day," Ravi told **Salar News,** adding, "But now, the lake is choked with garbage, a reminder of the consequences of rapid urbanisation and encroachment."

Diya, a 20-year-old student, reminisces about her grandmother's visits to the lake. "There were swans and so many birds. We used to enjoy the view for hours."

Despite years of complaints to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) — the City's civic body — the lake's revival remains elusive.

BBMP's decision to build an island and install a Shiva statue for tourism purposes backfired PHOTO: PTI

When **Salar News** reached out to BBMP Lake Department's official, he said that the civic body is working on the lake's revival. "We are working on fencing, silt traps, and pathway development projects with a three-month completion timeframe," he said on the condition of anonymity.

In 2019, BBMP's decision to build an island and install a Shiva statue for tourism purposes backfired. Environmentalists saw it as a disregard for the lake's ecological health and filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in High Court.

High Court, in March 2021, termed the island and statue project "prima facie illegal". However, litigation regarding the statue's removal is ongoing.However, the proposal to remove the Shiva statue has divided the community. While some residents view it as a religious symbol, others like Ajesh, a resident, believe environmental protection is paramount. "There has to be a way to save both the statue and the environment," Ajesh said.

BBMP has held public consultations to address these concerns.

"Our goal is to restore Begur Lake while respecting the community's cultural sentiments," said a municipal office employee. "The relocation of the statue is a step towards achieving that balance."

Begur Lake is just one among Bengaluru's many ailing water bodies. With summer's harsh grip, nearly 50 of Bengaluru Rural's 184 lakes have dried up, and 25 more are on the verge of collapse. Bellandur Lake and Sankey Tank have also suffered immensely due to pollution and untreated wastewater discharge.

Meanwhile, BBMP has sought Rs 67 crore from the State for the restoration of 69 lakes. The civic body claims to have revived 63 lakes for Rs 345 crore between 2019 and 2022. *—Salar News*

ASKED MEA TO CANCEL PRAJWAL'S PASSPORT: HM

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said the State government has written to the Ministry of External Affairs to cancel the diplomatic passport of Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexual abuse. He said it was issued against him on the basis of an arrest warrant by a court.

Prajwal reportedly left for Germany on 27 April, a day after Hassan went to polls, and is still at large. "The Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has already written to the Prime Minister, but the department (Home) writing it in accordance with law is different. Warrant has been issued now, on the basis of the warrant, a letter has been written stating that -- warrant has been issued and the diplomatic passport has to be cancelled," Parameshwara said. A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on Saturday against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the State government to probe the serial sex abuse charges against the MP.

A Blue Corner Notice seeking information on Prajwal's whereabouts has already been issued by Interpol. *—PTI*

Will not allow rave parties in State, warns Parameshwara

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday assured that the government is keen on making Karnataka "drug-free" state. He added that the government will crackdown on rave parties and not allow them.

"The accused will be caught, and the sources of drug supply will be investigated. It is important to identify the peddlers, and we will also stop the rave parties," he told reporters.

He said that there is a separate wing to track drugs supplied from other states. "Ganja is even grown on terraces. It is crucial to track down drug peddlers. Students who have come here for studies and are indulging in selling drugs are being monitored. They will be deported back to their countries," he said. 100 blood samples sent for testing

Meanwhile, the blood samples of the guests of a rave party busted at a farmhouse in Electronics City have been collected and sent to laboratory for testing, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said on Tuesday.

Various types of drugs were also seized, he said adding several attendees were from outside the State. Dayananda said, "On the night of 19 May, Bengaluru Police's Central Crime Branch, based on specific information, raided a farmhouse at Electronics City. Around 100 people were at the event where drugs and narcotic substances were found." "A case has been registered. Five people have been arrested." *—Salar News*

City police confirm Telugu actor's presence at rave party

Hema

Bengaluru, 21 May

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Tuesday said that popular Telugu actor Hema was present at the rave party titled "Vasu's Birthday: Sunset to Sunrise," which was raided by police on Monday in Electronics City where drugs were seized. Earlier, Hema had made a video in Bengaluru claiming that she was in Hyderabad, denying her presence at the rave party. According to reports, after the raid, the actress appealed to police officers asking them not to reveal her identity to the media. *—Salar News*

IN MEMORY OF

Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC President DK Shivakumar and other Congress leaders pay tribute to former PM Rajiv Gandhi on his 33rd death anniversary at KPCC office, in Bengaluru, on Tuesday PHOTO: SALAR

City police solve 5 theft cases, arrest 14

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

The City police has solved five different theft cases with the arrest of 14 people on Tuesday.

Mahadevapura police apprehended a suspect for stealing Rs. 1.4 lakh in cash and 78 grams of gold jewellery on 15 May.

The police investigation led them to a suspect near KR Puram, Tin Factory, who confessed to the crime. The stolen valuables estimated to be Rs. 4.3 lakh, were recovered.

Upparpet Police successfully apprehended two individuals involved in a mobile phone theft ring. Police held two more individuals on 7 May in Bagalur. A total of 176 stolen mobile phones of various brands, worth Rs. 22.4 lakh and a Toyota Etios car used in the crime were recovered on 7 May. In a separate operation, Kumaraswamy Layout Police station, apprehended an interstate thief targeting students with laptops. A total of 25 laptops were recovered during the investigation on 9 May.

City Police Commissioner Dayananda B takes a look at the mobile phones and laptops seized by Upparpet Police on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

In another operation, Chandra layout Police Station apprehended four individuals involved in a mobile phone snatching racket. Police were able to nab four more accomplices, seizing 32 stolen phones worth of Rs. 6.31 lakh. *—Salar News*

Rameshwaram blast: NIA raids 11 spots in 4 states

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

National Investigation Agency (NIA) carried out multi-state raids in connection with its probe in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case on Tuesday.

Several customers and hotel staff members were injured, some of them grievously, in the blast that caused extensive damage to the cafe in the IT City on 1 March.

The raids were carried out based on the inputs about the links of some suspects with those involved in the crime.

Kumaraswamy Layout and Banashankari in Bengaluru were among the places that were raided, the officials said.

In a coordinated action, NIA teams searched 11 locations in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, said the NIA. The probe agency, which took over the case on 3 March, had on 12 April arrested two key accused, including the mastermind Adbul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa, in the matter.

PHOTO: X@VISHALBHARGAVA5

Taahaa, and the other accused, Mussavir Hussain Shazib, who had allegedly placed Improvised Explosive Device (IED) at the cafe, were arrested from a lodge near Kolkata, where they were staying under the assumed identities. The two are allegedly members of Shivamogga-based Islamic module. *—PTI*

MYSURU CONGRESS LEADER STABBED TO DEATH BY HUSBAND

MYSURU, 21 MAY

A Congress leader and actress Vidya was stabbed to death allegedly by her husband in Mysuru. According to police, Vidya was found murdered in her house. Her husband Nandish was not reachable raising suspicions about his involvement in the crime. The couple has two daughters. The relationship between Vidya and Nandish had been strained for some time. A phone conversation between the two escalated and Vidya decided to go to Turganur village. During the arguement, Nandish, struck Vidya on the head with a hammer. Vidya, a resident of Srirampur, was Congress' Mysuru city secretary. She had also acted in a few Kannada films. A case has been registered at Bannur police station.

—Salar News/PTI

UN praises BWSSB for its water management

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) on Monday received accolades from the United Nations Climate Change Innovation Workshop for effectively adopting sustainable water procedures and efficient management.

BWSSB Chairman Dr V Ram Prasath Manohar took part in the UN Climate Change 5th Systemic Innovation Workshop. He explained in detail how the board has tackled the water crisis during the shortage, the challenges faced, and the effective management of the water supply. He said City is roughly about 800 square kilometres and about 1.40 crore people reside in the City. The BWSSB is tasked with supplying potable water and also managing the sewage system.

About 60 per cent are dependent on Cauvery water. The remaining 40 per cent is dependent on groundwater sources. Due to the failure of the monsoon, resulting in the depletion of groundwater, more than 50 per cent of bore wells failed. As a result, the dependency on Cauvery water increased suddenly.

BWSSB efficiently tackled this crisis by adopting innovative technology and sustainable practices. Strict enforcement of judicious practices in using water, installing aerators to prevent indiscriminate use of water, and using modern technology for managing bore wells are some of the methods adopted by the Board for effective management of water crises. *—ANI*

'ALLEGED PARTIALITY'

ECI must hold transparent polls: Activists

BENGALURU, 21 MAY

A total of 120 civil society groups and former bureaucrats across South India had a unified message for Election Commission of India (ECI): Maintain transparency to release actual voter turnout and work for the Constitution, not for governments.

Amid the delay in releasing voter turnout of Lok Sabha elections by ECI, the civil society groups and former bureaucrats met in the City on Tuesday for a panel discussion on how to ensure voters' voices are heard. The discussion was organised by Eddelu Karnataka (Wake Up Karnataka), a civil society collective.

Quoting Russian dictator Joseph Stalin — "It's not the people who vote that count, it's the people who count the votes" — the panel raised concerns about ECI's alleged "partiality" and failure to address petitions about violations of model code of conduct, and the lack of transparency in releasing final voter data. It urged the citizens to monitor alliance shifts of parties and candidates, PM candidate selection of INDIA bloc, BJP strategies and watch out for manipulations during speeches.

Activist Prashant Bhushan (right) was among the people who met in the City for a panel discussion on Tuesday PHOTO: SALAR

Lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan said, "Under the rule 49(s) of Conduct of Election Rules, the polling officer of each booth has to record the number of votes cast in each EVM and provide the figures in the signed document of 17(C) to polling agents and parties. Now, no data is available under this rule."

Former IAS officer MG Devasahayam said not releasing voter turnout data could lead to manipulation of the mandate. "During Emergency of 1975-77, it was free and fair elections and people had the freedom to bring back democracy."

The panel participants formed Citizen Vigilant Commission, consisting of former bureaucrats, judges and police officers. This commission will monitor ECI over the next three months to ensure it follows the rules and counts votes transparently. The collective urged citizens to be vigilant during counting and hold silent marches to apprise ECI that they are being watched.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Man arrested for attacking Kanhaiya Kumar

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Delhi Police on Tuesday arrested a 41-year-old man who allegedly assaulted and attacked with ink Congress' Lok Sabha candidate Kanhaiya Kumar last week, officials said. The police said the accused, Ajay Kumar, was arrested from his residence in New Usmanpur, the area where the incident occurred, adding that efforts are on to round up the other accused in the case. The incident took place on 17 May when Kanhaiya Kumar, INDIA bloc nominee from North East Delhi seat, was coming out from AAP office in New Usmanpur after a party meeting with local Councillor Chhaya Sharma when a group of people attacked him. *—PTI*

People being threatened to vote, claims Mehbooba

RAJOURI, 21 MAY

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti alleged on Tuesday that some groups are trying to "threaten" and pressuring people to vote for some particular candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. She alleged that one group is threatening people through fatwas (religious rulings) while the other group is threatening in the name of BJP. Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, Mufti said, "I met a lot of delegation here in Rajouri...I have observed that the situation that has been created is very scary. Religious Fatwas are being issued by one group, that if you don't vote for a particular candidate you will go to hell." Meanwhile, People's Conference leader Imran Ansari has been booked for allegedly manhandling a police officer and a polling official at a booth in the Baramulla district on Monday*—PTI*

Stones hurled at actor Mithun's roadshow in WB

MIDNAPORE, 21 MAY

Stones were hurled by some persons during a roadshow of actor-turned-BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty in Midnapore town on Tuesday, following which a clash broke out, police said. Agnimitra Paul, BJP candidate for Midnapore Lok Sabha seat where polling will be held on 25 May, accused Trinamool Congress workers of hurling glass bottles and stones at the procession, a charge denied by the ruling party in the state. Both Chakraborty and Paul were unharmed in the incident. TMC spokesperson Trinankur Bhattacharya denied the allegations and said, "We don't believe in such unruly acts. *—PTI*

Akhilesh's rally almost sees a stampede

AZAMGARH, 21 MAY

A stampede-like situation was witnessed during a public rally of Samajwadi Party (SP) in Azamgarh on Tuesday when party supporters and police entered into a scuffle, days after chaos erupted in INDIA bloc rally at Prayagraj. The party supporters also took down loudspeakers installed at the event. Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav and leader Dimple Yadav were also present on the stage when the incident occurred. Visuals from the scene depicted chaos, with broken chairs scattered around. his comes days after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav were forced to cut short the public meeting in Prayagraj's Phulpur constituency as the crowd broke the barricades and reached the dais, creating a stampede-like situation. *—PTI*

Kharge dubs Modi 'jhoothon ka sardar'

Kharge says Modi wants to end democracy

JAGADHARI, 21 MAY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'Jhoothon Ka Sardar' and claimed that BJP wanted to end democracy.

Addressing his first rally in Haryana, Kharge said people are fed up with BJP.

"There are a few people who say 'Modi, Modi'. He is a 'jhoothon ka sardar' (King of liars). Still you say 'Modi Modi'. I do not want to abuse anyone and I am not against Modi. But I am certainly against Modi's ideology and am fighting against it," Kharge said in the state's Jagadhri city. He said Congress is fighting against the ideology of RSS -- a Hindu right body and the ideological parent of BJP.

"You are snatching the Constitution and we are fighting against it. You want to end democracy and we are fighting it," Kharge said. "Modi ji, you feel that you are smart. People of this country are smarter than you. People are fighting against you," he added. Kharge said the current fight is between the people and Modi, and the people and the BJP. "Because, people are fed up with them."

On the Prime Minister , Kharge said he had promised Rs 15 lakh in everyone's bank account, 2 crore jobs every year, and doubling of farmers' income.

"Is he a liar or a good person.... What is wrong if I call such a prime minister 'Jhoothon Ka Sardar,'" he asked the gathering.

—PTI

Mallikarjun Kharge pays floral tribute to former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on his 33rd death anniversary on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

- On PM's remark Kharge said Modi had promised Rs 15 lakh in everyone's bank account, 2 crore jobs every year, and doubling of farmers' income.

HAZARIBAGH POTBOILER

BJP's Jayant gets showcause notice for not rallying

RANCHI, 21 MAY

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has slapped a showcause notice to former Union Minister and MP Jayant Sinha for not showing interest in "organisational work" and "election campaigning" ever since the party fielded Manish Jaiswal as the candidate from the Hazaribagh Lok Sabha seat.

"You are not taking any interest in organisational work and election campaigning ever since the party declared Manish Jaiswal as the candidate from the Hazaribagh Lok Sabha seat. You did not even feel the need to exercise your vote. The party's image has been maligned because of your conduct," the notice from the Jharkhand unit of BJP read.

"As per the instructions of State President Shri Babulal Marandi ji, you are requested to give clarification in this regard within 2 days," it further added.

BJP leader Jayant Sinha, son of former Finance Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Yashwant Sinha has recently joined the list of leaders who wished not to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

The Hazaribagh MP said that he has requested the party president JP Nadda to relieve him of "direct electoral duties" so that he could focus on efforts to combat climate change.

"I have requested Hon'ble Party President Shri @JPNadda ji to relieve me of my direct electoral duties so that I can focus my efforts on combating global climate change in Bharat and around the world. Of course, I will continue to work with the party on economic and governance issues. I have had the privilege of serving the people of Bharat and Hazaribagh for the past ten years," said Sinha in a post on X.

He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the opportunities provided to him. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

HC reserves order on chargesheet against Kavitha

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Rouse Avenue Court on Tuesday reserved the order on cognisance of Enforcement Directorate's supplementary prosecution complaint (chargesheet) filed against BRS leader K Kavitha and others.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja on Tuesday, after hearing the submissions at length by the Special Public Prosecutors (SPP) Naveen Kumar Matta and Simon Benjamin, reserved the order and fixed 29 May, 2024 for the pronouncement of the order on cognizance of the chargesheet.

The court also fixed 28 May, 2024 for consideration of chargesheet filed against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Recently, Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a supplementary prosecution complaint (chargesheet) in Excise Policy money laundering case in Rouse Avenue Court.

The chargesheet was filed against BRS leader K Kavitha and other accused, namely Chanpreet Singh, Damodar, Prince Singh and Arvind Kumar. Recently, Delhi High Court had issued notice to Enforcement Directorate and CBI on a bail petitions moved by Kavitha in the money laundering case pertaining to the scrapped Excise policy of Delhi. The bench of Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma fixed 24 May, 2024 for detailed arguments in the matters. *—PTI*

BJP's Abhijit can't campaign for 24 hrs for abusing CM

KOLKATA, 21 MAY

Hours after Election Commission debarred him from campaigning for 24 hours, BJP's Tamluk candidate Abhijit Gangopadhyay said he has written to ECI, urging the poll panel to reconsider the decision.

Election Commission on Tuesday censured former Calcutta High Court judge and BJP candidate Abhijit Gangopadhyay for his comment against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and debarred him from campaigning for 24 hours. EC described Gangopadhyay's remark as a "low-level personal attack", asserting that he violated Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

EC order would be effective from 5pm on Tuesday.

Gangopadhyay on Monday sent his reply to the showcause notice issued by EC for his "undignified" remark against Banerjee.

"The commission has carefully gone through the contents and averments made in the aforesaid reply of Abhijit Gangopadhyay and has again gone through the statement made and is convinced that he has made a low-level personal attack and thus violated the provisions of MCC.

The poll body also warned Gangopadhyay, BJP's Tamluk candidate, to remain careful in his public utterances during the campaign.

—PTI

Heartbroken over plight of Sandeshkhali women: Didi

Basirhat, 21 May

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she was heartbroken over the plight of women in Sandeshkhali. Banerjee slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for talking to Sandeshkhali protester and BJP candidate Rekha Patra over the phone, alleging that the country has the "worst track record in terms of women's safety and security under the BJP rule." *—PTI*

Lord Jagannath row: Sambit Patra to fast for 3 days

BHUBANESWAR, 21 MAY

Embroiled in a controversy over his "slip of the tongue" on Lord Jagannath, BJP leader and party's Puri Lok Sabha candidate Sambit Patra apologised and announced he will undertake penance by observing fast for three days from Tuesday after being criticised from different quarters.

Patra while speaking to reporters on Monday, had said that the state's most revered deity "Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." Patra, however, later clarified that it was a slip of the tongue and he wanted to mean that PM was an ardent 'bhakt' (devotee) of Lord Jagannath and not the other.

Taking to X, Patra said, "For this mistake, I apologise at the feet of Lord Sri Jagannath. I will fast for the next three days to atone for this mistake."

Patra also said that on the occasion of Modi's roadshow in Puri on Monday. While talking to media, instead of saying 'Maha Prabhu Sri Jagannath's Bhakt Modi', he mistakenly pronounced 'Modi's Bhakt Jagannath'.

The issue was aggravated when Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik strongly condemned Patra's statement and appealed to BJP to keep Lord Jagannath above the political discourse.

Patnaik, in an X post, criticised Patra for hurting Odia 'asmita' (pride).

"Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannatha is the Lord of the Universe. Calling Mahaprabhu a 'bhakt' of another human being is an insult to the Lord... it is totally condemnable. This has hurt the sentiments and demeaned the faith of crores of Jagannatha bhaktas and Odias across the world.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also condemned Patra's statement.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Stop maligning Tamils for votes, Stalin tells PM

CHENNAI, 21 MAY

Ruling DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday took strong exception to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that the missing keys of Lord Jagannath's treasury in Odisha have gone to Tamil Nadu, alleging it was an attempt at maligning Tamils for the sake of votes.

Modi should stop making such maligning remarks against Tamils, he said in a statement here, a day after Modi's comments came at an election rally in Odisha.

While lashing out at the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government in Odisha on Monday, the PM had said that "even the temple of Lord Jagannath in Puri is not safe in the hands of this government,", expressing concern over the missing keys of Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar (treasury) for the last six years.

He had said Odisha wants to know why BJD has suppressed the judicial commission report on Ratna Bhandar keys. "The role of BJD in the case is suspect. BJP government, after it comes to power on 10 June will make the report public," Modi had said, adding it is said that the Ratna Bhandar key has gone to Tamil Nadu.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Can Soren's arrest be challenged, asks SC

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Supreme Court on Tuesday asked former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren whether a writ court can examine the legality of his arrest after the trial court has taken cognisance of the prosecution complaint filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the money laundering case against him related to an alleged land scam.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma, which posted the matter for further hearing on Wednesday, asked Soren's counsel to first satisfy the court as to how interim bail can be granted to him for campaigning in the Lok Sabha poll when his application for regular bail has been dismissed. Senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Arunabh Chowdhury, appearing for Soren, sought time till Wednesday to respond to the court's queries. Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, opposed Soren's interim bail plea, contending his case was different from that of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. He said the trial court had on 4 April taken cognisance of the prosecution complaint, ED's equivalent of a charge sheet, upon finding that a prima facie case was made out against Soren.

The top court noted that Soren applied for interim bail when his writ petition was pending before the high court. *—PTI/ANI*

POLITICAL SLUGFEST

Are people who voted for AAP Pakistanis, Kejri asks Shah

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday criticised Union Home Minister Amit Shah for allegedly saying that those who are supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are "Pakistanis". He asked Shah not to "abuse" the people of the country and instead abuse him.

"Yesterday Amit Shah came to Delhi. There were less than 500 people at the meeting. And he started abusing people in the country continuously. Amit Shah said that Aam Aadmi Party supporters are Pakistani," Kejriwal said in a press conference on Tuesday.

Kejriwal pointed out that since people in Delhi, Punjab, and Gujarat have voted for the AAP in large numbers, all of them are Pakistanis as well.

"I would like to ask them that people in Delhi voted us to power with 62 seats and 56 per cent vote share. Are people from Delhi Pakistanis? In Punjab, people voted us to power in 92 out of 117 seats. Are the people of Punjab Pakistanis? The people of Gujarat have given us 14 per cent votes. Are people of Gujarat Pakistani. People of Goa loved us and trusted us. Are they Pakistanis?" he questioned. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Rajnath attacks Rahul after Pak leader's praise

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said former Pakistan minister Fawad Hussain, who stated that terrorists of his country were behind the Pulwama and Uri attacks, was praising , and sought to know whether such a leader, who was being hailed by an "enemy", should be "allowed" to form a government. He said Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was, is and would always remain India's. "I want to ask whether such a leader should he be allowed to form the government? Singh said.

—PTI

Internet was also suspended in the district following the incident PHOTO: X

1 killed, 3 hurt in Bihar post-election violence

SARAN, 21 MAY

One was killed and three others injured in post-poll violence in Bihar's Saran district on Tuesday morning, police said. The deceased was identified as Chandan Yadav, 25.

The incident happened in Bada Telma area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk.

An altercation broke out between two groups, said to be supporters of BJP and RJD, over allegations of irregularities during polling that happened on Monday in the area, amid which shots were fired.

"The injured persons were admitted to the nearest hospital. Later, two of them were sent to Patna for better treatment," Superintendent of Police Gaurav Mangla said.

"A case has been registered and an investigation is underway. Three people have been arrested in connection with today's incident," he said.

Internet was also suspended in the district. RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya was Mahagathbandhan candidate in Saran against BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy. *—PTI*

VP Dhankhar likely to attend Raisi's funeral

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar is likely to represent India at the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash, sources said on Tuesday.

They said Dhankhar is likely to leave for Iran on Wednesday.

A one-day state mourning is being observed across India on Tuesday as a mark of respect for Raisi.

The Iranian president, the country's foreign minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region in the northwestern part of the country, Iran state media reported.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday visited the Iranian embassy in Delhi and conveyed India's deepest condolences on the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a helicopter crash over the weekend.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Manipur land dept lodges FIR against Kuki group

IMPHAL, 21 MAY

The Manipur Land Resources department has lodged an FIR against Kuki National Front(Military Council), a militant organisation, for promoting enmity between different groups in the state. The complaint was filed at Imphal Police Station by Under Secretary in Land Resources department Mangoljao Kamei stating that "the erection of a gate bearing the words Kuki National Front Military Council with the name of the site mentioned as Thanting indicates to unauthorised changing of the original name of Thangjing." "It's a violation of Manipur Names of Places of Act 2024 and Manipur Ancient Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1976," it said. "Thangjing is a hill of historical importance and the Art and Culture department, GoM had declared it as a protected site" under relevant Acts and it falls under Churachandpur Khoupum Protected Forests. *—PTI*

2 killed, 40 injured after bus falls from flyover in MP

RAJGARH, 21 MAY

Two people were killed and 40 were injured when a private bus fell from a flyover in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district in the wee hours of Tuesday, police said. The accident occurred near Pachore town around 1.30am when the bus, carrying 55 passengers, was crossing the flyover. The bus driver lost control of the vehicle, causing it to plummet to the ground below, Pachore police station in-charge Akansha Sharma said. Of the injured, 19 suffered critical wounds and were referred to Indore, while the rest are undergoing treatment in different hospitals in Shajapur, Biora and Pachore, the official said. One of the deceased was identified as Harjat Singh, 28, and the identity of the other victim is yet to be ascertained. The bus was on its way to Pichhore town in Shivpuri district from Indore. The police have launched a search for the bus driver and conductor who fled the scene after the accident, and a case has been registered against them. *—PTI*

2 AIIMS doctors held for facilitating cheating during test

DEHRADUN, 21 MAY

Two doctors of AIIMS, Rishikesh were among five people arrested for allegedly helping candidates, appearing for the Institute of National Importance Combined Entrance Test for MDs, cheat in lieu of money, police said on Tuesday. Those arrested include Dr Ajit Singh (44) from Jind in Haryana, Dr Vaibhav Kashyap (23) from Patiala in Punjab, Aman Siwach (24) from Rohtak in Haryana, Vipul Gaura (31) and Jayant (22), both of whom hail from Hisar in Haryana, Dehradun Senior Superintendent of Police Ajai Singh said. They were arrested from a car near Barrage Road in Rishikesh late on Sunday evening, he said. They are charged with helping three candidates at an exam centre in Kangra in Himachal Pradesh. *—PTI*

Dowry death: UP court sentences 2 to life imprisonment

BALLIA, 21 MAY

A court has sentenced a man and his mother to life imprisonment for killing his wife for dowry in 2019. District Judge Gyan Prakash Tiwari on Monday awarded the sentence to Shyam Bahadur Rajbhar and his mother Chita Devi for killing Mamata Rajbhar, 25. Superintendent of Police, Dev Ranjan Verma said the incident took place on 27 October, 2019. An FIR in the matter was registered by the victim's brother Manoj Kumar. *—PTI*

300 trafficked Indians 'revolt' in Cambodia

AP cops said most of them are arrested

VISAKHAPATNAM, 21 MAY

In the wake of a human trafficking racket busted here recently, Andhra Pradesh police on Tuesday said around 300 Indians 'revolted' against their handlers in Cambodia on 20 May, leading to most of them being arrested in the foreign country.

As many as 150 youth from the port city and its vicinity have been stuck in Cambodia for a year already, where they are being coerced to carry out cybercrime and Ponzi scams by Chinese handlers, police said.

Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner A Ravi Shankar noted that these trafficked Indians caused large scale riots in Jinbei and Compound, Sihanoukvile in Cambodia, which is allegedly a hub for cybercrime.

On 18 May, Vizag police arrested Chukka Rajesh, S Kondala Rao and M Jnaneshwar Rao on human trafficking charges for luring youth from India with data entry jobs in Singapore but would actually traffic them to Cambodia for carrying out cybercrime.

Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner A Ravi Shankar said they have arrested 3 youths in Combodia for human trafficking PHOTO: ANI

Once in Cambodia, the youth would be held captive, tortured and compelled by Chinese handlers to execute scams such as task game fraud, stock market fraud and others, police said.

In an effort to extend assistance, police contacted the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and related departments to repatriate the youth safely as most of them have been lodged in a jail after Monday's 'revolt'.

According to Visakhapatnam Joint Commissioner of Police Fakkeerappa Kaginelli, nearly 5,000 Indians were trafficked to Cambodia from across the country through various agents.

Kaginelli told PTI that with the three arrested persons, 150 youth have been traced to Cambodia. *—PTI*

Kyrgyzstan: Parents write to govt

Parents of students from Madhya Pradesh studying in Kyrgyzstan have urged the Centre to ensure the safe return of their wards amid reports of fights between locals and foreigners in its capital Bishkek. As many as 15,000 students from India are reportedly studying in Kyrgyzstan. Talking to PTI on Tuesday, Alka Solanki said her son Raj was a medical student in the Central Asian country. "My son is scared because of what has happened in the country in the last two days. I only want my son to return home safely with other students. I have spoken to my son, and students are not permitted to go outside. They are scared," she said. *—PTI*

40 flamingos killed as plane hits them in Mumbai, probe sought

MUMBAI, 21 MAY

More than 40 flamingos were killed after allegedly being hit by an aircraft in Mumbai, police said on Tuesday, as environmental activists demanded a probe into it by DGCA and claimed urban planners had ignored warnings about such disasters.

So far, carcasses of 32 flamingos have been recovered from Ghatkopar area, the police said. The birds were hit by the aircraft before it landed on Monday night, a police official said.

Various calls were received from people about the dead birds spotted at some places in Ghatkopar, said Pawan Sharma, founder of the Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare (RAWW) and honorary wildlife warden with the forest department.

The forest department's mangrove cell along with RAWW teams during a search operation found 29 dead flamingos in the area on Monday night, he said.

Stray dogs scavenged a few birds after they fell on the ground and some of the animal body parts were also spotted by locals, Sharma said.

The Wildlife Conflict Mitigation and Management Plan needs to reviewed and revised by the airport authorities based on proper evaluation of the situation in coordination with the forest department and wildlife experts so that such incidents can be avoided in future, RAWW secretary and zoologist Chinmay Joshi said.

Workers lift the carcass of flamingos PHOTO: PTI

- So far, carcasses of 32 flamingos have been recovered from Ghatkopar area, the police said. The birds were hit by the aircraft before it landed on Monday night, a police official said

Nearly a lakh flamingos keep flying to the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary, which is a Ramsar site. The NGO, which along with other environment-focused organisations has been conducting a series of campaigns to save Mumbai's biodiversity, wetlands and mangroves, cautioned that the upcoming international airport in neighbouring Navi Mumbai could also be prone to such incidents. *—PTI*

Red alert for rains in two Kerala districts

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 21 MAY

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday issued a red alert for Pathanamthitta and Idukki districts in Kerala, predicting extremely heavy rainfall on 22 May.

These districts already have orange alerts in place and are expected to see very heavy rainfall in isolated areas, it said. Earlier in the day, the IMD had withdrawn red alerts for Pathanamthitta, Idukki, and Kottayam districts but issued new warnings due to the severe weather being predicted.

The IMD issued an orange alert for eight districts, including the capital Thiruvananthapuram, which has been experiencing widespread rainfall. Additionally, a yellow alert was issued for six northern districts: Palakkad, Kozhikode, Kannur, Malappuram, Wayanad, and Kasaragod.

As heavy rains pose potential hazards, the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) has advised people to be vigilant.

Commuters wade through a flooded road following rain in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday PHOTO: PTI

Intense summer heat in Delhi pushes power demand to all-time high of 7717 MW

New Delhi, 21 May

Delhi's peak power demand reached an all-time high of 7717 MW on Tuesday afternoon, amid the prevailing intense summer heat, Discom officials said.

According to the State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) Delhi real-time data, the peak demand of the city broke all previous records. It reached 7717 MW at 3.33 pm, they said. Delhi's previous all-time high peak power demand was recorded at 7,695 MW on 29 June, 2022, officials said. *—PTI*

A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours, while an orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

Meanwhile, a 66-year-old woman died after a portion of the wall of her under-demolished house collapsed over her due to intense rain in Pothencode here this morning, police said.

Met predicts squally weather, rain in Bengal's coastal districts from 24 May

The Met department on Tuesday predicted that squally weather conditions along with rain will prevail in the coastal districts of West Bengal from 24 May.

It warned fishermen not to venture into deep seas from May 23 due to the formation of a low pressure area in Bay of Bengal and its subsequent intensification into a depression.

Owing to the low pressure area, squally weather conditions, with wind speed above 45 kmph, may prevail in the coastal districts of West Bengal – Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas -- from 24 May, the Met department said. These districts may also witness thunderstorms till 25 May, it said. *—PTI*

Kerala achieved record revenue increase from ₹47k cr to ₹77k cr: Min

KERALA, 21 MAY

The Left government in Kerala has achieved a record revenue increase from Rs 47,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 77,000 crore in 2023-24, helping to mitigate financial challenges posed by the BJP-ruled Centre, according to state Finance Minister K N Balagopal.

"We've managed a record increase in the state's own revenue even as the Centre financially squeezes us. The state's own tax revenue rose from Rs 47,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 77,000 crore in 2023-24," Balagopal said. He pointed out that this represents a 60 per cent increase in the state's own tax revenue over just three years. "Without this increase, Kerala's economy would have collapsed due to the central government's anti-state policies." The minister also noted that the state government is doing everything it can to handle the crisis caused by the Centre's reduction in tax allocations and debt limits.

Balagopal, who is also a senior CPI(M) leader, said that Kerala successfully brought national attention to the Centre's alleged discriminatory approach by mobilising the state's people and organising a protest in New Delhi, led by the Chief Minister and including ministers and people's representatives. In the FB post, he also mentioned the state government's legal battle in the Supreme Court to secure its rights from the Centre. Other states also followed suit and filed similar cases in the Supreme Court, highlighting the importance of this issue for federalism, Balgopal said.

Kerala Finance Minister KN Balagopal PHOTO: PTI

The minister claimed that national leaders have acknowledged Kerala's stance on the issue.

"Through the last three budgets, the government has initiated several crucial projects for Kerala's future. These multi-pronged schemes aim to boost production, income, and employment opportunities," the minister said. *—PTI*

SL launches probe after 4 Lankans with IS links held in India: Report

COLOMBO, 21 MAY

Sri Lanka has launched an investigation to obtain information on four of its citizens with links to the banned Islamic State, who were arrested in India when on an alleged mission to carry out terror activities in the country, a media report said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) on Sunday apprehended four Sri Lankan nationals at the Sardar Vallabhai Patel airport in Ahmedabad after they travelled from Colombo via Chennai. The men travelled to India to carry out terror activities at the behest of the banned terror outfit Islamic State (IS) and are members of IS radicalised by a leader from Sri Lanka who is living in Pakistan, according to the Indian police.

Sri Lanka's state intelligence has asked for further information from its Indian counterpart to verify the background of the suspects and probe their links to the IS, the Daily Mirror newspaper reported.

Sri Lanka goes on alert after India arrests four Sri Lankans suspected to be ISIS PHOTO: ANI

Sri Lankan authorities will "immediately investigate" to take further action once the information is obtained, the newspaper said, citing sources. Public Security Minister Tiran Alles and Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon said they were taking these reports seriously and closely monitoring the developments.

Alles and Tennakoon said they would initiate discussions with Indian authorities to gather detailed information about the suspects and their activities, the report said. "We are working in close coordination with our Indian counterparts to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to address any potential threat," Alles was quoted. *—PTI*

B'desh MP goes missing in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 21 MAY

An MP of Bangladesh, Anwarul Azim Anar, has been missing for the last few days after he arrived in the city for medical treatment on 12 May, a senior official of the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata said. Anar, an MP of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League, has been missing since 13 May, he said. "He came to Kolkata on 12 May for medical treatment and was staying at his friend's place in Baranagar in the northern fringes of the city. On 13 May, he went to meet someone but didn't return. His friend later lodged a complaint," report said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Bombay HC denies urgent hearing to TISS PhD student for misconduct

MUMBAI, 21 MAY

Bombay High Court on Tuesday said there was no need for an urgent hearing on a plea filed by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) research scholar Ramadas KS, who was suspended from the institute for alleged misconduct and anti-national activities. A vacation bench of Justices Arif Doctor and Somasekhar Sundaresan posted Ramadas's petition for hearing on 18 June after the summer vacation of the high court. Ramadas, a PhD student from the School of Development Studies of TISS, had moved the court earlier this month challenging the 18 April order passed by the institute suspending him for two years. The institute, in its affidavit, said the student had an alternate remedy, and hence his petition was not maintainable. *—PTI*

Mother of infant rescued from flat dies by suicide

COIMBATORE, 21 MAY

A 33-year-old mother of an infant, who dramatically rescued recently from the sunshade of an apartment in Chennai, allegedly died by suicide as she was "deeply disturbed" following criticism over her alleged negligence.

According to Police, the woman resorted to the extreme step at her parent's house in Karamadai. A case was registered under section 174 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

"She has been deeply disturbed after her girl child accidentally slipped from her hands and fell onto the sunshade of the apartment where she was living with her husband in Thirumullaivoyal, Chennai," a police officer said.

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

The woman was found lying unconscious at her parents' house on 18 May and was immediately rushed to a hospital. *—PTI*

AFTER SINGAPORE SCARE

290 cases of new Covid variant Flirt detected

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

As many as 290 cases of KP.2 and 34 cases of KP.1, both sub-lineages of Covid-19 that are responsible for surge in cases in Singapore, have been found in India, according to official data.

However, a source in Union health ministry told PTI that they are all sub variants of JN1 and there is no associated increase in hospitalisation and severe cases.

"So there is no reason for concern or panic. The mutations will keep happening at a rapid pace and this is the natural behaviour of viruses like SARS-CoV2," the source said.

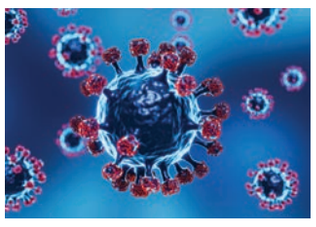


PHOTO: FREEPIK

- Data compiled by Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium showed that 34 cases of KP.1 have been found across seven states and UTs with 23 cases registered from West Bengal

The source further said that INSACOG surveillance is sensitive and is able to pick up the emergence of any new variant and samples are also picked from hospitals in a structured manner to detect any change in the severity of disease due to virus.

Data compiled by Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) showed that 34 cases of KP.1 have been found across seven states and UTs with 23 cases registered from West Bengal.

The other states are Goa (1), Gujarat (2), Haryana (1), Maharashtra (4) Rajasthan (2) and Uttarakhand (1).

As many as 290 cases of KP.2 have been registered with Maharashtra reporting the highest number at 148.

The other states and Union territories are Delhi (1), Goa (12), Gujarat (23), Haryana (3), Karnataka (4), Madhya Pradesh (1), Odisha (17), Rajasthan (21), Uttar Pradesh (8), Uttarakhand (16) and West Bengal (36).

KP.1 and KP.2 belong to a group of Covid-19 variants scientists have nicknamed 'FLiRT', after the technical names of their mutations. *—PTI*

INDIA MOURNS

Tricolour flies at half-mast as India observes state mourning for death of Iran President Ebrahim Raisi, at the Ridge, Shimla on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Can Iran avoid a political crisis after its prez's death?

The death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash this week occurred during one of the Islamic Republic of Iran's most challenging periods.

Raisi, a prominent figure in the political elite, held substantial sway over Iran's domestic policies. He was also central to Iran's recent moves to improve relations with its rivals in the region.

Given his sizeable influence, what will his absence mean for the country's domestic affairs? And how will it impact the country's relations in the region?

People attend a mourning ceremony for President Ebrahim Raisi at Vali-e-Asr square downtown, Iran ***PHOTO: PTI***

Maintaining stability at a perilous time

Raisi's government was very conservative and had a close relationship to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. There were almost no conflicts or disagreements between the two sides, which contrasts with previous governments, most of which had some distance or tension with the leader.

Raisi was also considered one of the leading candidates to succeed the 85-year-old Khamenei, who has held the office of Supreme Leader for 35 years. His broad influence within the country's conservative circles made him a significant figure in shaping the future of Iran's leadership.

However, his death, which occurred a year before the conclusion of his second term, came amid a backdrop of domestic, regional and international challenges.

Iran remains under severe sanctions imposed by the United States for its nuclear program, which have caused significant damage to the economy and had a profound impact on people's lives.

The country also witnessed one of the most significant protest movements in its history over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September 2022, following her arrest by the morality police.

There have been local protests in different parts of the country as well, mostly over the economic crisis and some of the government's domestic policies.

Moreover, parliamentary elections in March of this year saw one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the country's history. As a result, the holding of new elections, which is mandated within 50 days of Raisi's death, poses a significant challenge for the regime at a time when its public legitimacy is at its lowest.

In addition, the recent escalation in the ongoing shadow war with Israel has presented serious security concerns and given rise to a host of conspiracy theories.

Rumours have gained traction with the public suggesting the president's helicopter crash was the result of electronic warfare, a drone attack or even a ground assault by Israel. (The IRNA state news agency said the crash was due to a "technical failure".)

Despite these challenges, however, the transfer of power is unlikely to significantly impact the country's stability due to the nature of power dynamics in Iran.

Vice President Mohammad Mokhber has stepped in as acting president until new elections are held. It is expected the conservative inner circle close to the Supreme Leader will select its preferred candidate for the poll, aiming for a smooth transition with minimal challenges. As Khamenei posted on X: "The nation doesn't need to be worried or anxious, as the administration of the country will not be disrupted."

Hence, even though Raisi's successor will be nominated and supported by a conservative inner circle, he may embody somewhat of a moderate stance. Figures like the current parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, or former speaker Ali Larijani, who are both moderate conservatives, fit this description.

What will it mean for Iran's neighbours?

During his tenure, Raisi shifted the country's foreign policy more towards the Middle East, making it the top priority. This marked a departure from his predecessor, Hassan Rouhani, who had prioritised strengthening relationships with European countries and normalising ties with other Western nations.

During Raisi's presidency, for instance, Iraq hosted five rounds of negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, culminating in the historic normalisation of relations between the two in 2023.

Additionally, Iran has recently engaged in substantial negotiations with Jordan and Egypt, facilitated again by Iraq. These initiatives offered a chance to move past the sectarian conflicts that have long dominated the region and lay the groundwork for greater cooperation.

Iran also grew closer with both China and Russia also during Raisi's presidency, reflecting a strategic, long-term pivot towards the East endorsed by Supreme Leader.

However, Iran also continued negotiations with Western powers over its nuclear program, employing different tactics compared to Rouhani's tenure.

Iran's foreign policy looks likely to remain the same under a new president. The appointment of Ali Bagheri Kani as acting foreign minister following the helicopter crash (which also claimed the life of the current foreign minister) reinforces continuity.

Kani, who played a key role in leading the nuclear negotiations under Raisi, aligns with the country's established foreign policy direction.

In addition, Iran's closer relations with its neighbours signals a more permanent shift away from isolation. This will likely continue to improve in the short term.

—The Conversation

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Can AI save elephants from dying on railway tracks?

Tamil Nadu is using an AI-based surveillance system to prevent elephant deaths on its railway tracks.

Elephant deaths on and near the state's railway tracks are rising, with 36 fatalities recorded from train collisions in the past decade, according to official data.

Eleven of these fatalities occurred on two railway tracks near Madukkarai, where the forest borders the state of Kerala. These tracks intersect with the elephants' migratory route to neighbouring forests.

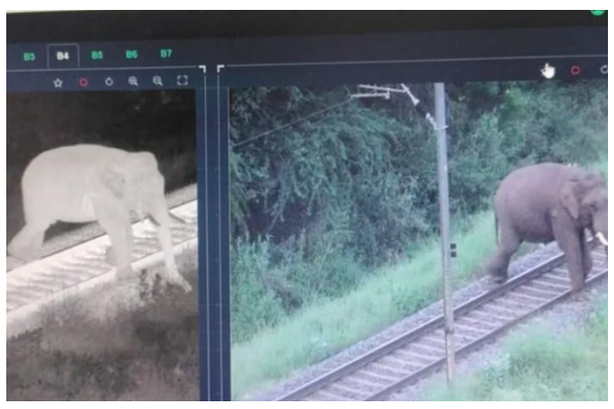
In 2021, the state's high court ordered the forest department and railways to prevent elephant deaths on these tracks.

The forest department has now installed 12 towers along two of Madukkarai's rail tracks, each equipped with an AI camera capable of thermal and visible light imaging, along with live viewing.

Project manager Ashish Rajput said that the AI system's cameras, comparable to those used by the Indian Army along the nation's borders, are programmed to even detect humans near railway lines.

When elephants are detected within 100ft of the railway track, alerts are sent to forest and railway officials, who coordinate to slow down trains and guide the elephants away to prevent collisions. Four personnel continuously monitor the system in the control room near the railway track.

The project, launched in February, has been executed at a cost of Rs 72.4 milion says Supriya Sahu, secretary TN Forest Department.



The cameras used by the AI system have thermal imaging and motion sensor capabilities ***PHOTO: BBC***

Previously, forest personnel conducted regular patrols along railway tracks to monitor elephant activity. Sahu said this method had limitations, and ensuring complete elephant safety from accidents posed "significant challenges".

Within months of its implementation, the AI system has detected nearly 400 instances of elephants approaching railway tracks and promptly reported to railway authorities, thus preventing potential accidents, she said.

"Alerts are sent if any animal, not just elephants, is found nearing the track," says Manikandan, who works at control room.

This is not the first time AI is being used to protect wildlife in India. In December, India's federal railway ministry said it was implementing an AI-based surveillance system - called Gajraj - in elephant corridors across several states in the country.

Under this project, officials are installing sensors using AI tech near railway tracks which send notifications to alert the railway administration and the forest department about the movement of the elephants, other animals, and humans to prevent accidents.

In African countries like Gabon, Kenya and Botswana, AI camera systems are being used for elephant conservation efforts.

Tamil Nadu has announced plans for its expansion of the new system to five other vulnerable areas in the state, including Coimbatore, Dharmapuri, Hosur, and Gudalur.

"Technological interventions significantly reduce train-related accidents involving wildlife," Sahu said. *—BBC News*

Tamil Nadu's forest department has launched an AI surveillance system to track elephant movement near railway tracks ***PHOTO: @ NATUREINFOCUS***

The growing promises of 3 cancer vaccines to prevent relapse

No magic bullet is in sight yet, but three vaccines for particular skin and lung cancer types have advanced to the last phase of clinical trials.

A cure for cancer — which is second only to cardiovascular diseases in its contribution to the global burden of disease — has long been a dream.

If successful, these vaccines should be available to patients in the next three to 11 years. Unlike vaccines which prevent diseases, these aim to cure them or prevent relapses.

Cancer in every person is different because the cells in every cancerous tumour have different sets of genetic mutations. Recognising this, two of the vaccines are personalised and tailor-made for each patient. Oncologists working with pharmaceutical companies have developed these individualised neoantigen therapies.

A vaccine typically works by training the immune cells of our body to recognise antigens – proteins from pathogens, such as viruses – against future attacks by the pathogen.

In cancer, however, there is no external pathogen. The cells of a cancerous tumour undergo continuous mutations, some of which help them to grow much faster than normal cells while some others help them evade the body's natural immune system. The mutated proteins in cancerous cells are called 'neoantigens'.

In individualised neoantigen therapy, the gene sequence of the tumour and normal blood cells are compared to identify neoantigens from each patient, and then a subset of neoantigens are chosen that are most likely to induce an immune response.

The vaccine for an individual patient targets this chosen subset of neoantigens.

These vaccines, jointly developed by pharma giants Moderna and Merck, have been shown in trials conducted so far to be significantly more effective in combination with immunotherapy than immunotherapy alone in preventing both the relapse of melanoma — a type of skin cancer — and non-small cell lung cancer after the tumours had been surgically removed.

Following these promising results in phase II clinical trials, the vaccines are now being tested on a larger group of patients in phase III trials. The studies are expected to be complete by 2030 for melanoma and 2035 for lung cancer.

The Moderna-Merck cancer vaccine may not be the first to reach the market. The French company OSE Immunotherapeutics published positive results last September from phase III clinical trials of a vaccine using a different approach for advanced non-small cell lung cancer.

3 vaccines for particular skin, lung cancer types have advanced to last phase of trials ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

Its vaccine, Tedopi, is scheduled to start confirmatory trials – which are the last step before regulatory approval – later this year and may be available by 2027.

Vaccines for pancreatic cancer being developed by BioNTech and Genentech, and for colon cancer by Gritstone, are also showing promising results in the early phases of clinical trials. Like the vaccines being developed by Moderna and Merck, these too are individualised neoantigen therapies based on messenger RNA (mRNA).

Within cells, there are two kinds of nucleic acid molecules that contain coded information vital to life: DNA and RNA. While DNA contains genetic information, mRNA — one among the different types of RNA — carries the codes for the proteins.

The RNA vaccine for an individualised neoantigen therapy is a cocktail of mRNA carrying the codes for neoantigens — the mutated fingerprint proteins in cancerous cells. For the Moderna-Merck study, scientists identified 34 neoantigens per patient.

When the vaccine is delivered after removing the tumour, it trains the immune system to recognise neoantigens and fight back against the cancer returning. Usually, the body's natural immune system corrects mutations and prevents us from having cancers. However, in some cases this natural immune response is insufficient, leading to tumour growth.

In individualised neoantigen therapy, these mutations in the tumour cells are used for vaccine development and for training the immune system to fight back against relapse after removal of the tumour.

Recent advances in artificial intelligence are helping identify potential neoantigens and manage personalised therapies. Firstly, gene sequencing of tumours and normal blood cells of a patient and their comparison produces a huge amount of data.

AI is used to find the genetic mutations of the patient's cancer in such 'big data'.

Moreover, individualised therapy requires timely production and delivery of vaccines that are different for each patient. AI is also useful in the management of such data. The siRNA and miRNA treatments work in a way opposite to mRNA. While each mRNA in a vaccine carries the code for producing a protein from a pathogen (antigen) or tumour (neoantigen) to train our immune systems against future attacks by the pathogen or tumour, siRNA directly targets the mRNA of the antigen or neoantigen and terminates the production of the protein it codes.

Discovered at the turn of this millennium, siRNA-based therapeutics attracted immediate attention, but their initial success was limited due to their inherent low stability, difficulties in delivering them to desired locations, and rapid clearance from bloodstream.

These improvements led to recent successes in FDA approvals of siRNA-based therapies and further promising reports in the treatment of diseases including a type of liver cancer. *—PTI*

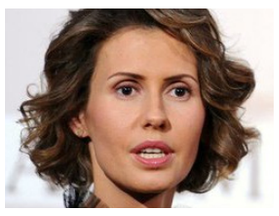


PHOTO: X/@GREATERIRAN92

Syrian First Lady diagnosed with leukemia

BEIRUT, 21 MAY

Syrian First Lady Asma Assad has been diagnosed with leukemia, the office of President Bashar Assad announced Tuesday. The President's wife was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. Asma Assad has previously been treated for breast cancer. In 2019, she announced that she was free of the disease. Born and raised in the UK, although her family is originally from Syria, she is a powerful figure. She is under western sanctions and has been a highly controversial figure in the course of the Syrian conflict. She was an investment banker before quitting to marry the then-newly minted President Bashar Assad, in 2000. She has been accused of using her British education to try to mask her husband's crackdown on dissent. *—AP*

Pakistanis warmed to stay indoors ahead of heatwave

ISLAMABAD, 21 MAY

Authorities in Pakistan on Tuesday issued an advisory urging people to stay indoors as the country is hit by an extreme heatwave that threatens to bring dangerously high temperatures and yet another round of glacial-driven floods. Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab, is shutting all schools for a week because of the heat, affecting an estimated 18 million students. It's the latest climate-related disaster to hit the country in recent years. Melting glaciers and growing monsoons have caused devastating floods, at one point submerging a third of the country. Pakistan recorded its wettest April since 1961, with more than double the usual monthly rainfall. Last month's heavy rains killed scores of people while destroyed property and farmland.*—AP*

9 Egyptians go on trial over Greece shipwreck

KALAMATA, 21 MAY

Nine Egyptian men went on trial in southern Greece on Tuesday, accused of causing a shipwreck that killed hundreds of migrants and sent shockwaves through the European Union's border protection and asylum operations. Outside the courthouse, a small group of protesters clashed with riot police as the proceedings got underway. Two people were detained. The defendants, most in their 20s, face up to life in prison if convicted on multiple criminal charges over the sinking of the "Adriana" fishing trawler on 14 June last year off the southern coast of Greece. International human rights groups argue that their right to a fair trial is being compromised as they face judgment before an investigation is concluded into claims that the Greek coast guard may have botched the rescue.*—AP*

1 dead after London to Singapore flight hits turbulence

BANGKOK, 21 MAY

Singapore Airlines says a person has died aboard and others were injured when a London-Singapore flight encountered severe turbulence. Singapore's Flight SQ321 from Heathrow was diverted to Bangkok and landed at 3:45 p.m. local time at Suvarnabhumi Airport, the airline announced in its Facebook page. The airline said the aircraft was a Boeing 777-300ER with a total of 211 passengers and 18 crew on board. Local emergency crews from Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital were on site to transfer injured people off the runway for treatment. Videos posted on the LINE messaging platform by Suvarnabhumi Airport showed a line of ambulances streaming to the scene. *—AP*

Thousands mourn Iran prez's death

Iran declares 5 days of mourning and funeral

DUBAI, 21 MAY

Mourners in black began gathered on Tuesday for five days of funerals and processions for Iran's late president, foreign minister and others killed in a helicopter crash. It was a government-led series of ceremonies aimed at both honouring the dead and projecting strength in an unsettled Middle East.

For Iran's Shiite theocracy, mass demonstrations have been crucial since millions thronged the streets of Tehran to welcome Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution.

An estimated 1 million turned out in 2020 for processions for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in a US drone strike in Baghdad.

Whether President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others draw the same crowd remains in question, particularly as Raisi died in a helicopter crash, won his office in the lowest-turnout election in the country's history and presided over sweeping crackdowns on all dissent.

Mourners in black began gathered on Tuesday for days of funerals
PHOTO: X/@WTXNewsArabic

Prosecutors already have warned people over showing any public signs of celebrating his death and a heavy security force presence has been seen on the streets of Tehran since the crash.

But Raisi, 63, had been discussed as a possible successor for Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His death now throws that selection into question, particularly as there is no heir-apparent cleric for the presidency ahead of planned 28 June elections. A procession on Tuesday led by a semitruck carrying the caskets of the dead slowly moved through the narrow streets of downtown Tabriz, the closest major city near the site of the crash Sunday. The bodies will travel on to the holy Shiite seminary city of Qom before travelling to Tehran later Tuesday. On Wednesday, a funeral presided over by Khamenei will then turn into a procession as well.

US refuse to assist in probing chopper crash

The Iranian government has requested the US to assist in probing the helicopter crash that killed Raisi but Washington won't assist Tehran largely due to "logistical reasons", according to a senior American diplomat.

—AP

JAPAN BLOCKS MT FUJI VIEW

The iconic view of Mount Fuji, including a popular convenience store in the foreground, is now blocked by a barrier in Japan. This move by local officials aims to curb unruly tourist behaviour such as littering and parking violations that have plagued the area
PHOTO: BBC

IN SPACE

UNSC junks Russia pact on banning arms

UNITED NATIONS, 21 MAY

The United States said Monday that Russia last week launched a satellite that could be part of weaponising space, a possible future global trend that members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemned even as they failed to pass a measure against it.

The Security Council resolution drafted by Russia rivaled one backed by the US and Japan that failed last month. The rival drafts focused on different types of weapons, with the US and Japan specifying weapons of mass destruction.

The Russian draft discussed all types of weapons.

The US and its allies said the language that the 15-member council debated on Monday was simply meant to distract the world from Russia's true intention: weaponising space.

Russia's UN ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, denied that his nation was trying to mislead the world.

Every nation says it wants weapons barred from space,

Vassily Nebenzia
PHOTO: X/@MARIONAWFAL

and council members repeated that Monday. But when it came time to vote, the council evenly split 7-7 between backers of the US and of Russia, with Switzerland abstaining.

The measure failed under UN rules because it didn't receive nine votes. Since before humans left the Earth, the world's most powerful nations have worried about their enemies using outer space to attack them.

The Soviet Union and the US sent men into space in 1961. Six years later, the Soviets, the US and the UK signed a treaty declaring outer space a global commons that could be used for only peaceful purposes. *—AP*

France, Belgium back Israel ICC warrants

JERUSALEM, 21 MAY

France and Belgium released statements supporting the world's top war crimes court's request for arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas, after Israel and the United States both harshly condemned the effort.

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. While Netanyahu and Gallant do not face imminent arrest, the announcement Monday was a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

"France supports the International Criminal Court, its independence, and the fight against impunity in all situations," its Foreign Ministry said on Monday, around the same time Belgium Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib posted on X, "Crimes committed in Gaza must be prosecuted at the highest level, regardless of the perpetrators." *—AP*

Netanyahu said he rejected with disgust that democratic Israel had been compared with what he called mass murderers *PHOTO: NBCPHILADELPHIA*

Netanyahu denounces bid to arrest him over Gaza assault

JERUSALEM, 21 MAY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has angrily condemned the International Criminal Court's prosecutor for seeking arrest warrants for him alongside Hamas's leaders over alleged war crimes in the Gaza conflict.

Netanyahu said he rejected with disgust that "democratic Israel" had been compared with what he called "mass murderers". The Chief ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, said there were reasonable grounds to believe that Netanyahu and his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant bore criminal responsibility for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. At least 35,500 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry. On Monday, US President Joe Biden said there was "no equivalence - none - between Israel and Hamas". Khan said Netanyahu was suspected of crimes including starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, murder, intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population, and extermination. *—BBC News*

ISRAEL KILLS 7 PALESTINIANS IN WEST BANK

JERUSALEM, 22 MAY

Israeli forces raided a militant stronghold Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing at least seven and wounding several, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The Israeli military said it struck militants during an operation into the city. In addition to the seven fatalities, the Palestinian Health Ministry said nine people were injured. Among those killed was Dr Ossayed Kamal Jabareen, the surgery specialist at Jenin Governmental Hospital who was killed on his way to his work, according to Dr Wissam Abu Baker, the hospital's director. The raid was ongoing and the casualty numbers could rise. The raid into Jenin is part of months of surging violence in the Palestinian territory. Nearly 500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, part of an Israeli crackdown on militancy in the territory. *—AP*

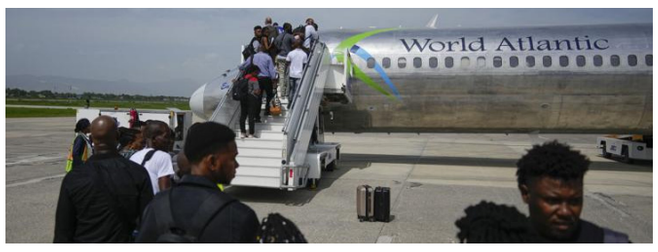
Haiti airport opens 3 months after clashes

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 21 MAY

Haiti's main international airport reopened Monday for the first time in nearly three months after relentless gang violence forced authorities to close it.

The reopening of the Toussaint-Louverture airport in the capital of Port-au-Prince is expected to help ease a critical shortage of medications and other basic supplies. The country's main seaport remains badly affected. Gangs control 80 per cent of the capital. U.S.-based airlines are not expected to start using the airport until late May or early June.

The first commercial passenger flight since March left for



Before Monday, the sole airport operating in Haiti was in Miami nearly two hours behind schedule, with sweating passengers complaining to local carrier Sunrise Airways about the lack of air conditioning until takeoff.

Before Monday, the sole airport operating in Haiti was located in the north coastal city of Cap-Haitien. It was out of reach for many seeking to flee the country, with roads leading from Port-au-Prince controlled by gangs that have opened fire on cars and buses passing through. *—AP*

Germany's FM in Kyiv as Ukraine struggles

KYIV, 21 MAY

Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in the latest public display of support for Ukraine by its Western partners. This is amid the slowdown of promised weapons and ammunition from NATO countries such as Germany, which has left Ukraine vulnerable to a recent Russian push along parts of the front line.

Baerbock renewed Berlin's calls for partners to send more air defence systems, as Russia pounds Ukraine with missiles, glide bombs and rockets. Germany is the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the United States.

Annalena Baerbock
PHOTO: X/@ABAERBOCK

Ukraine's depleted troops are trying to hold off a fierce Russian offensive along the eastern border in one of the most critical phases of the war, which is stretching into its third year.

Germany recently pledged a third US-made Patriot battery for Ukraine, but Kyiv officials say they are still facing an alarming shortfall of air defences against the Russian onslaught.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Kremlin's forces are still focusing their efforts on the eastern Donetsk province and northeastern Kharkiv region, where explosive-laden Russian glide bombs are wreaking destruction on military and civilian areas.

"This brings us back again and again to the need for air defence — for additional defence systems that could significantly mitigate the difficulties for our warriors and the threat to our cities and communities," Zelenskyy said late Monday on social media. *—AP*

AMID UNREST

Aus evacuates nationals in New Caledonia

NEW CASTLE, 21 MAY

Australia and New Zealand sent airplanes to New Caledonia on Tuesday to begin bringing home stranded citizens from the violence-wracked French South Pacific territory.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Australia had received clearance from French authorities for two flights to evacuate citizens from the archipelago, where indigenous people have long sought independence from France.

Hours later, a Royal Australian Air Force C-130 Hercules touched down in Noumea, the capital. The plane can carry 124 passengers, according to the Defence Department. "The Department of Foreign Affairs said 300 Australians were in New

Armed clashes, looting, arson and other violence turned parts of Noumea into no-go zones
PHOTO: BBC NEWS

Caledonia. It did not immediately confirm whether the Australian-organised flights would also evacuate other stranded foreign nationals, believed to number in the thousands.

New Zealand's government also announced that it had sent a plane to New Caledonia to begin evacuating about 50 of its citizens. Noumea's international airport remains closed to commercial flights. Its reopening will be reassessed on Thursday. At least six people have died and hundreds more have been injured since violence erupted last week in New Caledonia following controversial electoral reforms passed in Paris.

About 270 suspected rioters have been arrested as of Tuesday, and a 6 pm-6 am curfew is in effect for the archipelago of about 2,70,000 people, which is a popular tourist destination with its idyllic beaches and climate. France has sent in over a thousand security personnel to try to quell the unrest and restore control.

Armed clashes, looting, arson and other violence turned parts of Noumea into no-go zones. Columns of smoke billowed into the sky, hulks of burned cars littered roads, businesses and shops were ransacked and buildings became smoking ruins. *—AP*

Engaged with India over equal treatment of all: US

WASHINGTON, 21 MAY

- India has trashed such allegations as based on misinformation.

The Biden administration is deeply committed to promoting and protecting universal respect for the right to freedom of religion and has engaged many countries, including India, on the importance of equal treatment for members of all religious communities, a senior US official has said.

State Department Spokesperson Matthew Mille was responding to a question on a New York Times story titled "Strangers in Their Own Land: Being Muslim in Modi's India", which alleges that the world's largest Muslim community in India is raising their families and children with fear and uncertainty.

"I won't speak to private diplomatic conversations but we are deeply committed to promoting and protecting universal respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief all around the world," Miller said. The article published over the weekend alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "chipped away at the secular framework and robust democracy" since taking office.

India in the past has trashed such allegations as based on "misinformation and flawed understanding" of the country.

Modi has also asserted that he has never uttered a word against minorities, and the BJP has "not just today but never" acted against them. He, however, made it clear that he is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens". *—PTI*

Rupee rises 6 paise against US dollar

MUMBAI, 21 MAY

The rupee appreciated 6 paise to close at 83.31 against the US dollar on Tuesday following a weak greenback against major currencies overseas and softening crude oil prices in international markets. However, a sluggish trend in the domestic equity markets restricted the sharp upside in the local currency, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.32 and touched an intraday high of 83.26 and a low of 83.36. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.31 (provisional). "A decline in crude oil prices and fresh foreign inflows also supported the rupee. US Dollar softened on rate cut expectations by Fed but hawkish comments by Fed officials supported the US dollar at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary – Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. *—PTI*

Gold, silver retreat from record levels amid profit taking

MUMBAI, 17 MAY

Gold and silver prices retreated from record highs in the national capital on Tuesday, with the yellow metal plunging by Rs 550 per 10 grams due to profit-taking and weak global trends. According to HDFC Securities, gold prices were impacted by hawkish comments from one of the US Fed Reserve members, who suggested that interest rates will need to continue at current levels for a longer period to bring inflation back to target. Gold prices declined by Rs 550 to Rs 74,650 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 75,200 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also declined Rs 1,600 to Rs 94,500 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 96,100 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets were trading at Rs 74,650 per 10 grams, down by Rs 550 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. *—PTI*

Mahindra Finance appoints Mahesh Rajaraman as CRO

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services on Tuesday said it has appointed Mahesh Rajaraman as Chief Risk Officer (CRO) of the company with effect from 1 August. In a regulatory filing, Mahindra Finance said Mallika Mittal has tendered her resignation and ceased to be the CRO of the company with effect from 17 May. Mittal would be exploring opportunities externally as per her resignation letter.

Her resignation would be effective from close of business hours on 16 November when she would cease to be employee of the company, it added. Rajarama holds 29 years of experience in the banking sector with demonstrated ability in leading and building teams, Mahindra Finance said. *—PTI*

Wheels India earmarks ₹200cr cap expenditure

CHENNAI, 21 MAY

Steel wheels manufacturer for trucks, agricultural tractors, passenger vehicles and construction equipment, Wheels India Ltd has drawn up plans of Rs 200 crore as capital expenditure for the current financial year, a top official has said. The capital expenditure would be spent on offload tractors, construction and also in the cast aluminium, machining for windmill casting segments, company MD Srivats Ram said here. Wheels India reported a 64.3 per cent increase in its net profits for the March 2024 quarter at Rs 36.8 crore, as against Rs 22.4 crore registered in the same period of last year. Revenues during the quarter under review stood at Rs 1,167 crore as compared to Rs 1,172 crore registered a year ago. Ram said exports did well for the company registering a 24.5 per cent growth driven by the United States and other markets while Europe continuing to remain 'sluggish'. *—PTI*

Mkt cap of firms hit $5T for first time ever

Nestle, Maruti, IndusInd Bank are the gainers

MUMBAI, 21 MAY

Sensex declines 52.63 points to settle at 73,953.31 ***PHOTO: PTI***

The market capitalisation of companies listed on BSE crossed USD 5 trillion for the first time on 21 May.

Benchmark BSE Sensex declined by nearly 53 points in a volatile trade on Tuesday amid weak trends from Asian and European markets and fresh foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share Sensex declined 52.63 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 73,953.31 as 18 of its constituents declined while 12 ended with gains. The index gyrated around 426 between a high of 74,189.19 and a low of 73,762.37 in day trade.

The broader Nifty of NSE, however, closed higher by 27.05 points or 0.12 per cent to 22,529.05, driven by gains in metal shares. As many as 27 Nifty shares declined while 23 closed with gains.

Among the Sensex components, Nestle, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were the major laggards.

Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

"The domestic market experienced a sideways trend and concluded on a flat note today, halting a three-day streak of gains as cautious comments from US Fed officials weighed on investor sentiment. As the general election approaches its final stages, volatility is anticipated to remain elevated. However, despite the ongoing volatility, the market has nearly recouped the losses from the previous peak," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.34 per cent while smallcap index declined 0.18 per cent.

Among the indices, metal rallied by 4.08 per cent, utilities by 1.99 per cent, power by 1.96 per cent, commodities by 1.79 per cent and energy by 1.01 per cent.

Financial services, IT, telecommunication, auto, bankex and teck were the laggards.

"Weak Asian and European cues kept the mood sluggish in the domestic market through the trading session. Investors are trading with caution in the run up to poll outcome and are keeping their equity exposure limited," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. *—PTI*

ONGC PROFIT UP 19 TIMES

Crude oil futures decline on low demand; ONGC gains

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Crude oil for May delivery marginally fell Rs 3 or 0.05 per cent to Rs 6,576 per barrel ***PHOTO: PTI***

Crude oil futures on Tuesday marginally declined 0.05 per cent to Rs 6,576 per barrel as participants trimmed their positions on low demand.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for May delivery marginally fell Rs 3 or 0.05 per cent to Rs 6,576 per barrel with a business volume of 5,415 lots.

Globally, West Texas Intermediate crude oil traded 1.09 per cent lower at USD 78.93 per barrel, while Brent crude was trading 0.97 per cent lower at USD 82.90 per barrel in New York.

Meanwhile, State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's (ONGC) March quarter net profit soared 19 times as the year-ago period had a one-time exceptional provision, while it posted a record earnings for the full fiscal.

The company's standalone net profit of Rs 9,869 crore in January-March - the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2023-24 - compared with a profit of Rs 528 crore in the same period of the previous financial year, according to a company statement.

India's top oil and gas producer had made a provision of Rs 9,235 crore in the January-March 2023 quarter towards disputed taxes for the period from 1 April, 2016, to 31 March, 2022.

- ONGC reported a 4.3 per cent rise in crude oil production in the fourth quarter this year to 4.71 million tonnes

ONGC reported a 4.3 per cent rise in crude oil production in the fourth quarter this year to 4.71 million tonnes. The price realised for the same also was higher at USD 80.81 per barrel compared to USD 77.12 a barrel in January-March 2023.

Gas price was, however, lower at USD 6.50 per million British thermal units as opposed to USD 8.57 in the previous year. Also, gas production fell 2.4 per cent to 4.95 billion cubic metres.

Its revenue from operation was 4.6 per cent lower at Rs 34,637 crore. It has invested around Rs 37,000 crore of capex in FY24 (2023-24 fiscal) compared to Rs 30,208 crore in the previous fiscal.

Its overseas arm, ONGC Videsh Ltd ended the year with 7.178 million tonnes of crude oil production and 3.34 bcm of gas output. This compared with 6.349 million tonnes of crude oil production in FY23 (2022-23) and 3.822 bcm of gas output. ts turnover decreased 18.2 per cent to Rs 9,553 crore 'mainly due to non-accounting of revenue from Sakhalin-1 (project in Russia) and lower crude price realisation', it added. *—PTI*

India to be $1T digital economy by FY28: Min

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Rajeev Chandrasekhar ***PHOTO: ANI***

India's digital economy is growing at 2.8 per cent per annum and is expected to reach USD 1 trillion by 2027-28, Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said at an outreach programme.

The Minister further said the value of the IndiaAI mission will be doubled to Rs 20,000 crore from Rs 10,000 crore.

The government earlier expected India to reach the USD 1 trillion-mark by 2026-27 but the target has been moved by a year due to various reasons, including the Covid-19 pandemic, he said.

"Digital economy is growing at the rate of 2.8 per cent because of the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His vision laid down in 2015 has played out well. We are already the fastest growing digital economy of the world. We are aiming to be USD 1 trillion digital economy by 2027-28," Chandrasekhar said.

He was speaking at "Vishesh Sampark Abhiyan" on Monday evening at Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri's official residence. The event was attended by leaders of about 300 ITs, startups and the technology industry.

- The Minister said the Prime Minister has already approved Rs 1 lakh crore as seed fund, which will be invested in research and development for fuel innovation and India AI mission with a total value of Rs 20,000 crore

The Minister said the Prime Minister has already approved Rs 1 lakh crore as seed fund, which will be invested in research and development for fuel innovation and India AI mission with a total value of Rs 20,000 crore. *—PTI*

TO EASE THE BIZ

SEBI gives nod to change rules for firms planning IPOs

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

PHOTO: PIXABAY

To facilitate ease of doing business for companies planning IPOs, SEBI has said any change in the size of offer for sale (OFS) requiring fresh filing will be based on only one of the criteria -- either issue size in rupee or number of shares.

Further, promoter group entities and non-individual shareholders holding more than 5 per cent of the post-offer equity share capital can be permitted to contribute towards the shortfall in minimum promoters' contribution (MPC) without being identified as a promoter, according to a notification issued by SEBI.

Companies promoted by entrepreneurs often have several rounds of funding prior to listing their equity shares on the stock exchanges. In such situations, the promoters' holding may fall short of the minimum promoter contribution i.e., 20 per cent of the post-offer equity share capital. While the current ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) rule permits certain categories of investors to contribute equity shares held by them towards the shortfall, further flexibility has been provided.

In addition, equity shares from the conversion of compulsorily convertible securities held for a year before filing the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) are to be considered for meeting MPC requirements.

Meanwhile, SEBI has revamped the method for calculating the market capitalisation of listed companies under the Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) rules.

Instead of using the market capitalisation of a single day (currently 31 March), listed companies will now use the "average market capitalisation" for a six-month period.

Market experts believe the market capitalisation of a listed entity keeps fluctuating on a daily basis based on market dynamics and, therefore, an average of market capitalisation figures over a reasonable period of time (six months) would more accurately reflect the market size of the listed entity and consequently the ranking, vis-a-vis its peers.

The changes came after a recommendation of an expert committee chaired by SEBI's former whole-time member SK Mohanty in a bid to promote ease of doing business. The amendment aims to specify a defined period for calculating average market capitalisation. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

THINKUVATE STARTS ₹100CR FUND FOR TECH STARTUPS

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Early-stage startup investment firm ThinKuvate on Tuesday announced their first India-focused fund worth Rs 100 crore.

In the first phase, ThinKuvate team will be rolling out the fund in key cities like Nagpur, Raipur, Bengaluru and Chennai, with an aim to tap into emerging startup hubs in India along with established centres, the statement further said.

The India fund will invest up to Rs 3 crore in seed to series A startups, with a focus on tech across sectors. According to a company statement, the firm aims to invest in 12-15 startups every year through this fund. *—PTI*

JSW to invest ₹3K cr for cement plant in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

JSW Cement, part of USD 24.25 billion JSW Group, on Tuesday unveiled it plans to invest around Rs 3,000 crore to establish a greenfield cement manufacturing facility in Nagaur district of Rajasthan.

According to a company release, the ground-breaking ceremony was held recently to commence the construction of the factory.

JSW Cement's investment in the new cement facility includes a clinkerization unit of up to 3.30 million tonne per annum and a grinding unit of up to 2.50 million tonne per annum, along with an 18 MW waste heat recovery based power plant. The investment also includes an approximately 7 km long Overland Belt Conveyor to transport limestone from the mines to the manufacturing plant and arrangements to use alternative fuel in the kiln.

The investment will be funded through a mix of equity and long-term debt. *—ANI*

PHOTO: AGENCIES

'DECLARE TEA A NATIONAL DRINK'

SILIGURI, 21 MAY

North Bengal Tea Producers' Welfare Association (NBTPWA) demands tea be declared a "national drink" on International Tea Day.

The producers demanded to declare tea a national drink while they are celebrating Tea Day at Siliguri in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal today.

The producers have distributed around 5000 cups of free tea to the common people of Siliguri. The drive has also been conducted to attract the younger generation to tea. There are 500 tea gardens in North Bengal, especially in the Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars regions. *—ANI*

LIFTING OF RESTRICTIONS

Tourism will return to pre-Covid levels: Study

NEW YORK , 21 MAY

Topping the 2024 list of economies are the US, Spain, Japan, France and Australia ***PHOTO: ANI***

International tourist arrivals and the travel and tourism sector's contribution to global GDP are expected to return to pre-pandemic levels this year, driven by the complete lifting of Covid-19-related travel restrictions and strong pent-up demand, as per the new World Economic Forum travel and tourism study, released on Tuesday.

Topping the 2024 list of economies are the US, Spain, Japan, France and Australia. The Middle East had the highest recovery rates in international tourist arrivals - 20 per cent above the 2019 level, while Europe, Africa and the US all showed a strong recovery of around 90 per cent in 2023.

Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024 (TTDI), a biennial report published in collaboration with the University of Surrey, analysed the travel and tourism sectors of 119 countries around a range of factors and policies.

"This year marks a turning point for the travel and tourism sector, which we know has the capacity to unlock growth and serve communities through economic and social transformation," said Francisco Betti, Head of the Global Industries team at the World Economic Forum.

"The report offers a forward-looking window into the current and future state of travel and tourism for leaders to navigate the latest trends in this complex sector and sustainably unlock its potential for communities and countries across the world."

The global tourism industry is expected to recover from the lows of the Covid-19 pandemic and surpass the levels seen before the crisis.

As per the report, this is largely being driven by a significant increase in demand worldwide, which has coincided with more available flights, better international openness, and increased interest and investment in natural and cultural attractions.

However, the report painted that the global recovery has been mixed. While 71 of the 119 ranked economies increased their index scores since 2019.

- However, the report painted that the global recovery has been mixed. Although the sector has moved past the shock of the global health crisis, it continues to deal with other external challenges, from growing macroeconomic, geopolitical and environmental risks, to increased scrutiny of its sustainability practices.

Although the sector has moved past the shock of the global health crisis, it continues to deal with other external challenges, from growing macroeconomic, geopolitical and environmental risks, to increased scrutiny of its sustainability practices.

In addition, labour shortages are ongoing, and air route capacity, capital investment, productivity and other sector supply factors have not kept up with the increase in demand. *—ANI*

Baggage delivery time at KIA, 5 airports improves

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

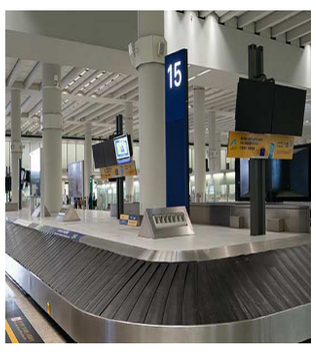


PHOTO: ANI

The baggage delivery time at Delhi, Mumbai and four other major airports has improved significantly in the last four months, with more than 90 per cent of the passengers getting their baggage arriving within 30 minutes of an aircraft landing, according to the civil aviation ministry.

The Ministry has also advised all domestic and international airlines operating at other airports to improve baggage delivery timings.

In January, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) started an exercise to boost the baggage delivery system of the domestic airlines at the country's six major airports -- Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

The exercise under the aegis of the civil aviation ministry was started after it was noticed that baggage was getting delivered late after the landing of a plane.

As per the global standards prescribed by IATA (International Air Transport Association) and the provision under the OMDA (Operation, Management and Development Agreement) with airports, baggage should be delivered to passengers within 30 minutes of the arrival of the aircraft.

In a release on Tuesday, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) said that when the exercise was started on 14 January, only 62.2 per cent of the passengers were getting their baggage within IATA-prescribed timelines.

After a detailed analysis by the BCAS and domestic airlines, efforts were made to overhaul and upgrade equipment, services and monitor in order to speed up baggage delivery. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

WFI exempts Olympic quota winners from trials

NEW DELHI , 21 MAY

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Tuesday decided to exempt all six Olympic quota winners from selection trials but their form and fitness will be assessed at the upcoming Ranking Series event and the subsequent training camp in Hungary. The WFI said the decision to not hold trials has been taken under peculiar circumstances and should not be used as a precedent in the future. The WFI also made it clear that if any wrestler is found to be lacking in fitness, the federation would consider a replacement through trials before 8 July, the deadline for sending entries. India has six quotas for the Paris Games where Aman Sehrawat (57kg) will be the lone male wrestler in the fray from the country.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X / @RAFAELNADAL

Rafael Nadal returns to Roland Garros to practice

PARIS, 21 MAY

Rafael Nadal returned to Roland Garros on Monday to practice and try to figure out whether to compete at the French Open, a tournament he has won a record 14 times. The 37-year-old Spaniard showed up late in the afternoon with his coach, Carlos Moya, and a couple of sparring partners at Court Philippe Chatrier, which was open to the public. About 6,000 fans were there at the French Open's main stadium, cheering loudly as Nadal stepped onto the court. After the practice lasted about an hour and a half, Nadal signed several autographs before disappearing through a doorway and into a tunnel that led toward the locker rooms.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X / @ARNSLT

Liverpool confirms Arne Slot as Klopp's replacement

LONDON, 21 MAY

Arne Slot will take on one of the most daunting challenges in soccer by replacing Jurgen Klopp as Liverpool manager. Slot was confirmed on Monday after he signed a long-term contract with the six-time European Cup winner and 19-time English champion. He will follow in the footsteps of an Anfield icon in Klopp, who ended Liverpool's 30-year wait for the English title in 2020 and won a full set of major trophies in his time at the Merseyside club.—*PTI*

Toni Kroos to retire after Euro 2024

MADRID, 21 MAY

Toni Kroos will retire from soccer after trying to give Real Madrid yet another Champions League trophy and lead Germany to the European Championship title at home. Madrid said Tuesday that the 34-year-old German international "has decided to bring an end to his time as a professional footballer following Euro 2024."—*AP*

IPL ELIMINATOR

RR desperate to arrest slide against RCB

RR's do-or-die IPL Eliminator IS against an in-form Bengaluru

AHMEDABAD, 21 MAY

Sanju Samson's Rajasthan Royals will face a stern test of character as they look to arrest a shocking slide in a do-or-die IPL Eliminator against an in-form Royal Challengers Bengaluru, here on Wednesday.

The Royals, at one stage, had looked set for a top-place finish in the league stage before a string of four defeats and a washout in the last game against KKR resulted in Sanju Samson's side finishing third behind Sunrisers Hyderabad.

On the other hand, RCB have sensationally fought their way back from the brink of elimination. After losing seven of their first eight games this season, the team led by Faf du Plessis hit a dream run and finally knocked out defending champions Chennai Super Kings a few nights ago to seal a playoff berth.

If Rajasthan Royals are coming off four losses and a rained-off game, RCB have notched up six consecutive wins to sound a warning to their rivals that they mean business in the playoffs.

RCB will take on Rajesthan Royals

PHOTO: X / @IPL

RR, the 2008 IPL winners, suddenly find themselves as the underdogs, when a couple of weeks ago they were red-hot favourites.

When on song, Rajasthan Royals have shown they are unbeatable, but the last four games have exposed frailties in their batting and bowling.

The exit of Jos Buttler has taken a lot of firepower out of their batting and a lot will depend on Yashasvi Jaiswal (348 runs), skipper Samson (504), and Riyan Parag (531) to halt the slide.

Samson and Parag will once again be expected to deliver the goods for RR, with England's Tom Kohler-Cadmore expected to partner Jaiswal in what seems like a frail opening pair going by form and experience.

Shimron Hetmyer is expected to be available for the contest giving Rajasthan solidity in the lower order, which has not made a big contribution with the bat this season.

RRs strong bowling lineup could come in handy given the venue for the Eliminator has not been a batting paradise like the other grounds, where shorter boundaries and docile tracks have made the bowlers' job tougher. —*PTI*

Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray PHOTO: X / @GONETGENEVAOPEN

Murray's comeback ends in defeat; Djokovic to face Hanfmann

GENEVA, 21 MAY

The dream of one more match between Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic evaporated on Tuesday as Murray tumbled out of the Geneva Open on his comeback from an ankle injury. Wild card Murray was 7-5, 4-1 down to Yannick Hanfmann when a thunderstorm lashed the Parc des Eaux-Vives grounds on Monday.

They resumed on Tuesday, with the German world number 85 taking little more than 10 minutes to win the second set 6-2.

Ever since Friday's draw, tennis fans had been relishing what could perhaps have been the last match between members of the Big Four who have dominated men's tennis this century: Djokovic, Murray, Rafael Nadal and the now-retired Roger Federer.

Instead, Hanfmann will now face world number one Djokovic in the second round on Wednesday.

Now number 75 in the world, Murray, aged 37 and playing with a metal hip, has said he is unlikely to carry on playing competitive tennis beyond the next few months, while Nadal, also plagued by injuries, is likewise facing the end of his career and is unsure if he will make a farewell appearance at next week's French Open.

The Geneva match was former world number one and three-time Grand Slam winner Murray's first tour-level outing since damaging tendons in his left ankle in Miami in March. The 28-man Swiss clay court tournament serves as a final tune-up before the French Open, the second Grand Slam of the year.

Djokovic, who turns 37 on Wednesday, took a wild card to play in Geneva in a bid to rescue an alarming dip in form ahead of his French Open title defense next week. —*AP*

The quartet of Amoj Jacob, Jyothika Sri Dandi, Muhammed Ajmal, and Subha Venkatesan with its reward PHOTO: X / INDIA_ALLSPORTS

Indian mixed 4x400m team sets national record

BANGKOK, 21 MAY

India's mixed 4x400 relay team set a national record while winning the gold medal at the inaugural edition of the Asian Relay Championships here on Monday but missed the target of entering the Paris Olympics qualification bracket.

The quartet of Muhammed Ajmal, Jyothika Sri Dandi, Amoj Jacob, and Subha Venkatesan clocked 3 minutes 14.12 seconds to win the race. The earlier national record of 3:14.34 was clocked by the Indian team while winning a silver medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

India was leading in all four legs of the relay race.

Sri Lanka finished second with a time of 3:17.00 while Vietnam was third with 3:18.45. Monday's timing will put India in the 21st place -- from earlier 23rd -- in the Road to Paris list of World Athletics while the aim was to be either in the 15th or 16th spot.

India, thus, is in a difficult position to make the Olympics cut as only sixteen teams will compete in the mixed 4x400m relay event in Paris.

Fourteen mixed 4x400m teams have already automatically qualified for the Paris Olympics during the World Athletics Relays in Nassau, Bahamas earlier this month, and only two spots were left to be filled based on the best timings of countries till the qualification deadline of 30 June.

Czech Republic (3:11.98) and Italy (3:13.56) are currently in the 15th and 16th spot in the Road to Paris list, below the top 14 teams that have booked Paris tickets during the World Athletics Relays in Bahamas. —*PTI*

SHARJAH CHESS: ARAVINDH ERRS, LOSES LEAD

SHARJAH, 21 MAY

A late blunder cost Indian Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram dearly as he not only lost the game to Iran's Bardiya Daneshvar in the seventh round of the Sharjah Masters but also his lead.

From his pole position, Aravindh slipped to the joint third spot as Sam Shankland defeated American compatriot Hans Moke Niemann to match the Iranian on points.

Aravindh was at the top of his game till he blundered. It looked like a rosy scenario wherein the Indian went wrong only at the nth hour.

The tactical skirmish that ensued would still be to Aravindh's benefit but a late blunder settled the game in Iranian's favour. Another Indian, Arjun Erigaisi could not crack the solid defences of Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran and had to settle for a draw.

The draw left Erigaisi still a half point behind the leading duo. —*PTI*

Aravindh PHOTO:PTI

THAILAND OPEN TRIUMPH

Satwik-Chirag regains world number 1 ranking

NEW DELHI, 21 MAY

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Tuesday regained the number one spot in the men's doubles world rankings following their triumph at the Thailand Open.

The Indian duo had slipped to No. 3 after the second-round loss at the All England Championships and then gave a walkover in the Asia Championships in China due to an injury to Satwik. They made a spirited comeback at the Thailand Open, winning their second title of the season with a straight-game win over Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi of China on Sunday. In the BWF rankings released on Tuesday, they climbed two places with 99670 points to reclaim the top spot after five weeks.

Double Olympic medalist PV Sindhu dropped one place to No. 15 in the women's singles rankings, while HS Prannoy retained his No. 9 ranking and was the only Indian inside the top 10 of the men's singles.

Lakshya Sen dropped three places to slip to No. 14. Kidambi Srikanth (No. 26), and Priyanshu Rajawat (No. 33) dropped a place each, while Kiran George slipped to No 36.

In the women's doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa were the best-ranked Indians at No 19, having climbed two sports. Commonwealth Games bronze medallist duo Teresa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand dropped a place to be ranked World No. 29. —*PTI*

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty PHOTO:PTI

PHOTO:PTI

TREESA-GAYATRI ENTERS 2ND ROUND OF MALAYSIA MASTERS

KUALA LUMPUR, 21 MAY

Indian shuttlers Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the second round of women's doubles competition after securing a straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun and Liang Ting Yu at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 here on Tuesday.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa and Gayatri, seventh-seeded, notched up a fine 21-14 21-10 win over Huang and Liang, ranked 104, in the round of 32.

There were four Indians in the men's singles qualification round but none could cut the main draw.

Sathish Kumar Karunakaran, who won his maiden BWF Super 100 title at Odisha Masters last December, beat Malaysia's Cheam June Wei 21-15 21-19 before going down 21-13 20-22 13-21 to Indonesia's Shesar Hiren Rhustavito. —*PTI*

PARALYMPICS CHAMPION

Sumit defends F64 javelin world title

KOBE, 21 MAY

Reigning Paralympics champion Sumit Antil on Tuesday defended his F64 javelin throw world title while Thangavelu Mariyappan and Ekta Bhyan also grabbed gold medals in their respective events as India jumped to third place in the World Para Athletics Championships here.

With five medals won on a productive fifth day, India's tally swelled to 10 (4 gold, 4 silver, 2 bronze), and the country is currently placed below China (15 gold, 13 silver, 13 bronze) and Brazil (14 gold, 6 silver, 5 bronze).

Antil, who had won gold medals in the Tokyo Paralympics and 2023 World Para Athletics Championships, sent his spear to a distance of 69.50m to stand on top of the podium.

The 25-year-old Haryana athlete thus continued his global domination in the F64 javelin event. He is the current world record holder also, courtesy of his massive 73.29m throw while winning gold in the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year.

He also holds the World Para Athletics Championships record of 70.83m which he had produced while winning the gold in the last edition in Paris in 2023.

World Para-Athletics: Sumit Antil wins gold; Thangavelu becomes men's high jump champion PHOTO: PTI

Compatriot Sandeep won the bronze medal in the same event with a throw of 60.41m. Sri Lanka's Dulan Kodithuwakku took the silver with a throw of 66.49m.

Antil was the leader all through the event in the nine-man field as he opened with a 68.17m effort before coming up with his day's best jump of 69.50m on the second attempt. His next four attempts read 64.04m, 65.58m, 69.03m and 68.08m.

- Reigning Paralympics champion Sumit Antil on Tuesday defended his F64 javelin throw world title while Thangavelu Mariyappan and Ekta Bhyan also grabbed gold medals in their respective events as India jumped to third place in the World Para Athletics Championships here.

Sonipat's Antil wanted to pursue a career in wrestling, but in 2015, when he was 17, his motorbike was hit by a speeding truck while he was returning home from a tuition class.

As a result, his left leg was amputated and he had to abandon his dream of becoming a wrestler. His father, employed in the Indian Air Force, died when he was seven. —*PTI*

Leverkusen's 2 steps from soccer immortality

DUBLIN, 21 MAY

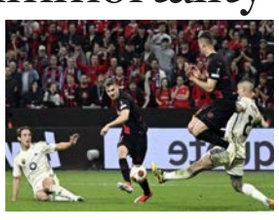


PHOTO: X / @BAYER04_EN

Bayer Leverkusen is two games from European soccer immortality. The new champion of Germany has two cup finals in four days — starting Wednesday in the Europa League against Atalanta — to complete a previously unthinkable unbeaten season in domestic and continental competition. On Saturday, Leverkusen will be heavily favored to win the German Cup final against a Kaiserslautern team that finished 13th in the second division, not so far from falling into relegation playoffs.

And so the biggest remaining challenge for coach Xabi Alonso's team is game No. 52 of 53, in Dublin against an Atalanta that is finishing the season strong. It feels fitting because the Europa League has been a regular drama for Leverkusen.

Three times in six games in the knockout rounds the team was 2-0 down deep into the second half and still behind entering stoppage time: In both round of 16 games against Qarabag and the semifinals return leg against Roma.

In another streak-saving Europa game, at West Ham in the quarterfinals, Leverkusen was set to advance on aggregate score yet needed an 89th-minute goal by wingback Jeremie Frimpong to draw 1-1 and stay unbeaten. —*AP*